SELECTED WORKS OF
ARCHIBALD ROBERTSON

I

Selected Works of Archibald Robertson, Volume 1.

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Archibald Horace Mann Robertson (1886–1961)

Workers of the World, UNITE!

FIRST EDITION: EDITORIAL PREFACE

Archibald Horace Mann Robertson (1886–1961) was a British skeptic, freethinker, and a member of the Communist Party from 1938 onward, after the rise of Nazism in Europe. Robertson summed up a fair amount of his life in his essay, "Seventy-Five Years" (1961) which is included in this volume.

The reason for assembling this collection is that unfortunately most theorists and communist thinkers have now allowed this figure to languish in obscurity, despite the fact that Robertson's work was quite influential. By far his most lasting contributions were his discussions of early Christianity, specifically his two books *Jesus: Man or Myth?* (1946) and *The Origins of Christianity* (1954). These two volumes, especially the latter, became particularly influential in the post-Stalin USSR, where Robertson's work was translated into Russian and became the source of intense scrutiny by Sergey Kovalev. The debate which followed spiraled and led to an academy-wide confrontation on the issue of whether or not Jesus was a historical figure, and in the 1960s, sadly after both Robertson's and Kovalev's deaths, the debate was settled and the "Mythological School" of thought was regarded as useless for Marxist scholarship. The same book (*Origins*) was translated into several other languages later as well, including Chinese, Hungarian, Polish, Italian, Dutch, Romanian, and Czech.

Unfortunately, his other essays did not enjoy the same attention, and worse is that even the above volumes have now been reduced to trinkets, which only the occasional bible scholar has ever heard of or cited. As a result, we have endeavored to go through periodicals and other documents to collect and edit together a compilation of Robertson's shorter essays on topics ranging from ethics to religion. Our hope is that communists will find this, at the very least, an enlightening part of history and perhaps some due attention can be given to this otherwise forgotten Marxist theorist. We have opted here to collect and focus on Robertson's writings from 1930 onward, as those evoke his communist leanings clearest.

Sadly, there is no known archive of Robertson's drafts or papers or letters which we are aware of which has meant that many of his writings are, as of right now, unobtainable, but records of them exist. As such, we leave it to future researchers to continue the search for Robertson's writings and bring them from obscurity for the usage of Communists all over the world. This volume is only meant to produce a small selection of his works primarily derived from the periodicals *The Literary Guide and Rationalist Review*, the *Rationalist Annual*, and *The New Statesman and Nation*, which were three of his favorite places to publish. However, he also published variously in *The Daily Worker* (now called *Morning Star*), *The Monthly Record* (South Place Ethical Society), and other rationalist, secularist, and atheist venues. Likewise, on at least one occasion (which is translated into English for the first time in this volume) he is known to have made a special contribution in Russian, and others may well exist. As such, there is still a wealth of material which Robertson contributed to the Marxist cause on topics ranging from ethics, metaphysics, Marxist theory and praxis, historical research, literary analysis, and beyond which all should be, at some point, collected and revived.

Throughout this volume we have endeavored to transcribe Robertson's works successfully, but no doubt an occasional error has slipped through. In trying to be faithful to his writing, we have made almost no editorial changes to his work, and the few that have been consciously made have been carefully notated in footnotes marked "Editors." Unless explicitly stated as an editorial note, all footnotes otherwise belong to Robertson himself. While most pieces Roberston wrote also always included his name and often his address at the bottom, in a few pieces we have omitted them simply for space saving measures. These have not affected the contents of his arguments or thoughts in any way.

It is our hope that this volume will contribute both to our fellow comrades overseas in the United Kingdom in establishing more of their own history and reviving the works of their forebearers in the Communist Party, and also provide interest for Marxists world

over. In the future, we intend to compile a separate volume on Robertson's contributions to the historical study of early Christianity (only some of which appear here), which will no doubt be of interest to Marxists involved in this historical research.

As a Marxist and a historian, it is our firm stance that as soon as we allow the history and writings of our active members to be lost, the sooner we too will lose our way in the loss of where we came from. This is an attempt to rectify one of those losses.

Editors of Red Justice Press
10 April 2025

SECOND EDITION EDITORIAL PREFACE

While it was never our intention to hide various works, the reality of the situation is that Archibald Robertson was an immensely prolific author and his letters, articles, and books are scattered throughout history and time. It is thus a point at which we will always fail that we did not happen to obtain all the articles he wrote.

In addition, in accumulating numerous books and essays, we found that there were so many valuable contributions that a second edition of Robertson's works was sorely needed. And it would need to be radically and drastically expanded.

As such, we endeavored throughout the course of 2025 and 2026 to create a second and expanded edition of Archibald Robertson's works which could stand as an authoritative and accessible introduction to his writing and contributions to Marxist and socialist thought. Though aligned with the later revisionist Communist Party of Great Britain, Robertson himself did not participate much in the revisionism, though he distanced himself from Stalin's "errors" and "repressions," and he further passed before the official Sino-Soviet Split had taken place. As a result, we do not know what side he would have taken after such an event. Perhaps he might have followed some of his more radical colleagues in the party like George Derwent Thomson.[1] It is difficult to know where he would have landed by the mid-1960s if he had lived that long. But his comments reveal that he considered the USSR and China to be the two footholds of Socialism and held the latter in high regard consistently.

Regardless, he maintained a loyal Marxist-Leninist approach even afterward, and one that permeated all his writings. We have endeavored here to provide a selection of his most important pieces, and then also reprinted his excellent books on the French Revolution, Protestant Reformation, history of the Church in England, and beyond, which were all absent in the first smaller volume.

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[1] That he read George Thomson's work is confirmed in Archibald Robertson, "The Greeks in the Making," *The Daily Worker* (7 February 1957): 2.

We have endeavored to ensure faithfulness to his works in this process and have only rarely intervened to update spelling or similar. The new edition of essays and articles will also include many of his pre-Marxist writings which we neglected and will showcase his growth from a general social democrat into a full-on Marxist communist. This will also include his pamphlet on Ernest Belfort Bax, who was a major inspiration to him.

We were finally able to get better access to *The Daily Worker* for this edition, largely rounded out his work. Most of these works were small and light on analysis, and thus, we have included only the more poignant examples. We have produced, first and foremost, a *Selected Works* not a *Complete Works*. Robertson was also known to publish in even more obscure places, deliver numerous public lectures, etc. but as he passed away without leaving any heirs or apparent literary executors, many of these are now in total obscurity (probably lost forever, save the titles and occasional summaries in still extant periodical works by others). With the exception of the final two pieces, we have attempted to place all of Robertson's works in rough chronological order. The excerpt from *How to Read History* seemed however a perfect bookend, while the "Marxism and Christianity" was published long after Robertson's untimely death.

Regardless, since undertaking this initial project we have found that Robertson's contributions and connections were far greater. After his death, he was eulogized by the noted Marxist theoretician R. Palme Dutt,[2] and he was close to Maurice Cornforth, J. B. S. Haldane, Christopher Hill, Jack Lindsay, Edward Conze, and others. Hill in his later revisionist years later came to chide Robertson as a "dreadful old Stalinist dogmatist" which Robertson would have happily taken as a compliment.[3] Robertson thought very little of the

[2] *The Literary Guide* (February 1962): 61.

[3] Quoted in Michael Braddick, *Christopher Hill and the Life of a Radical Historian* (London: Verso, 2025), 10.

splitters who left the party over Hungary, of which, Hill was one.[4] Robertson even interacted through public letters (as readers will see in this volume) with W. E. B. DuBois, which is found in the first political writing of note we have found of Robertson's. He was also a known friend of Guy A. Aldred, an anarcho-communist,[5] and he was well-acquainted with the famous novelist and historian H. G. Wells and philosopher Bertrand Russell. Endorsements of his work came from the highest positions in the Communist Party of Great Britain, with J. R. Campbell even writing positive reviews of Robertson's work on early Christianity.[6]

To be clear, therefore, we are dealing here with a Marxist-Leninist author who was connected with some of the largest names in the western Marxist canon; whose contributions on various subjects were immense; and whose character was well regarded by many thinkers (several of whom even now are respected among anti-revisionist Marxist-Leninists). It is therefore rather criminal his works have been for so long sidelined. It is no surprise they were by biblical scholars, and liberal academia. The Russian Revolution and then the aftermath of WWII ended all chances of Marxists making any serious impact in those fields of inquiry, and to this day the few Marxists in them are revisionists and inculcated with "Western Marxist" traditions of "critical theory" and other nonsense. We must forward the work of Archibald Robertson, learn where he failed, and continue proper, masses-centered studies of history. Reprinting Robertson's work for thorough-going and careful evaluation is a necessary step, and with this second, much expanded, and improved edition, we hope to begin this process meaningfully.

Editors of Red Justice Press 31 January 2026

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[4] Also one of the least principled, as he only left because one of his reports was not published. It was vain selfishness that caused him to leave, unlike others who at least had a backbone of moral code (as discordant and unintelligent as said code might have been).

[5] Guy A. Aldred, "Archibald Robertson," *The Word* 23, no. 1 (November 1961): 9.

[6] J. R. Campbell, "The Religion of Revolt," *The Daily Worker* (26 November 1953): 2.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Selected Works of Archibald Robertson

S. Verdad and the American Problem	1
To the Editor of *The Nation*	2
Labour Party Policy (1)	4
To the Editor of *The New Statesman*	5
Atheism in the French Revolution	7
Agnosticism and Materialism	9
Ernest Belfort Bax: Thinker and Pioneer	10
F. J. Gould and Fascismo	35
Ridicule and Contempt	36
Correspondence (1)	37
The Election	38
The Slavonic Josephus	40
Seeing a Religion Die	45
The Moscow Trial	49
The Secularization of the State and the Freedom of the Individual	50

The Issue of Freedom 66

Hitler's Democracy 67

Labour and Sanction 68

Sanctions and War 70

Class Justice 72

Standards of Living in Great Britain and the U.S.S.R. 73

The Materialist Conception of History 75

"Si Vis Pacem" 89

Rationalism and Reaction 91

The Invasion of Finland 93

Communism Explained 94

Defense of "Communism Explained" 95

The Rival Civilisations 96

Full Circle 97

Correspondence (2) 99

Anglo-Soviet Relations 101

The Supposed Jesus Myth 102

Anglo-Soviet Friendship 103

C.P. Affiliation 104

War Criminals 106

The Churches and the New World 107

Twilight of Christianity 134

The Modern World
(Excerpt from *Morals in World History*) 137

That Religious Revival Again! 146

Morals and Politics (1) 149

Morals and Politics (2) 151

Russian Anxiety 153

The Soul of the Labour Party 154

Ethics in a Changing World 156

Loyalties 168

The Making of a Rationalist 172

The Birth Certificate of Democracy 187

French Communists 189

Dialectical Materialism 190

The Cold War 194

Czechoslovakia 196

Democracy and Socialism (1) 198

Democracy and Socialism (2) 199

The Gods are Athirst 200

Democracy and Socialism (3) 202

Soviet Tactics and Socialism (1) 203

Soviet Tactics and Socialism (2) 205

Marxism, Past and Present 207

The Government's Tory Ancestor 210

Bulgarian Trials 211

The Real Battle 212

Letter to Attlee 213

Boycott 214

Peace Campaign 215

Solomon and Secular History 217

Napalm 220

Same Old Cry 221

Royalty and Human Rights 222

The Slavonic Josephus Again 226

True to Form 230

Communication 231

Author's Reply to Critic 234

Review of Karl Kautsky's *Foundations of Christianity* 237

Correspondence (3) 240

The End of Antiquity 241

Family Portrait 244

The Myth Theory—A Symposium 245

Humanism in History 252

Why be Communist? 273

Lenin's Testament 274

Reserve Judgment 275

Expediency 276

Rosy Views of World Govt 277

Excerpt from "What is Vital in Shaw" 279

The Dregs of Liberalism 281

Cure for Racialism 284

What is Wrong with Russell? 285

The Fascists Feared Him 288

The Revolt of Common Sense (1) 289

The Revolt of Common Sense (2) 290

Nuclear Warfare (1) 291

God in the Cold War 292

Nuclear Warfare (2) 295

Soviet Communism 296

Falsification? 297

Is it Peace? 298

Socialism and Religion: An Essay 303
1 Introduction 303
2 Ruling Class Religion and Mass Religion 305
3 Humanism into Marxism 324
4 Religion and the Labour Movement 339

The Two Camps 354

Seventy-Five Years 359

Marxism and Christianity 364

Excerpt from *How to Read History* 375

Appendix: Tributes to Archibald Robertson

Archibald Robertson: An Appreciation (J. Hutton Hynd) 377

Archibald Robertson Memorial 379

The Late Archibald Robertson (Hector Hawton) 382

Archibald Robertson—A Personal Tribute 384

Archibald Robertson (Guy A. Aldred) 388

Archibald Robertson (R. Palme Dutt) 390

SELECTED WORKS OF ARCHIBALD ROBERTSON

I

S. VERDAD AND THE AMERICAN PROBLEM

Originally published in *The New Age* (22 June 1911): 188

[Editors: This was a response to W. E. B. Du Bois' reply to a racist one Mr. S. Verdad, who made highly racist remarks in the 15 December 1910 issue in an essay entitled "Foreign Affairs." Du Bois chastised him and attempted an interaction, but Robertson added his own comments satirically attacking Verdad and his racism]

Sir,—Your correspondent, Mr. Burghardt Du Bois, who complains of Mr. Verdad's remarks on the American negro, is very innocent. He does not know his Verdad. Otherwise he would not ask whether it is necessary to be a blackguard, and to indulge in deliberate insult and falsehood, in order to be brilliant.

Of course, Mr. Verdad is a Nietzschean, and is therefore above such moral superstitions. Has not Mr. Du Bois heard that, according to the up-to-date view, courtesy, truth, and humanity are characteristic only of slaves, while blackguardism is the mark of superhumanity?

By the way, the omniscient Mr. Verdad is guilty of another error this week (June 15), when he says that Nietzsche pointed out "more than fifty years ago" that pure races had ceased to exist. Nietzsche was only 17 years old at that time. Really, it is a pity Mr. Verdad should lay himself open to correction on such a point by a miserable slave-moralist like myself.

A. H. M. Robertson.

TO THE EDITOR OF *THE NATION*

Originally published in *The Nation* (12 August 1911): 710

Sir,—I submit that the only answer which a good democrat can give to the question now under discussion in your column is: "None, so long as the Universities are under the present oligarchical and plutocratic control and influence; much, if they can be brought under the control of the whole nation." The right note is struck by your correspondent, Mr. H. Edwards, when he asks if it is not time "that the expenditure of our two ancient Universities was carefully examined from the democratic standpoint." Perhaps Mr. Edwards is aware—or if not he will be glad to know—that the Trades Union Congress has persistently and unanimously demanded a Royal Commission to inquire into the origin, value, and administration of the endowments, not only of our ancient universities, but of the great public schools. The production of an authoritative balance-sheet of these immense endowments, originally intended for the poor, would be of more help to the democracy in its struggle against educational privilege than all the efforts of those who are seeking to reform the universities "from within." It would be well that democratic politicians should lay to heart the fact that a real popular demand is springing up for this inquiry into the endowments. Unfortunately, the present Minister of Education has twice met the Trade Unionists' demand with a refusal.

Moreover, there can be no doubt that the feeling is strong among organized workers that all grades of education should be under public control, or, till such a time as this can be realised, that at least the teaching of controversial subjects, such as economics and social science, should be under the control of the workers, and free in every way from the possibility of plutocratic influence. This feeling is not satisfied with arrangements under which control is vested in "joint boards," half of Labor representatives, half of university or other upper-class nominees. The organised workers have had too much experience of "conciliation boards" in the industrial world to relish

this plan. The Amalgamated Society of Railway Servants, together with some districts of the South Wales Miners' Federation, have given expression to their feeling on this point by affiliation to the Central Labor College, Oxford, which is exclusively under working-class control.

Finally, let those who wish to benefit the working class educationally remember that the cry of "no charity, but justice," is popular, and rightly so. If there are those in the universities who are desirous of spreading the light of learning among the workers from above, as a philanthropic enterprise, let them try; but if they think that their efforts will be permanently helped by getting "elected persons" of the Labor movement to sit on committees with them, or even by inducing Labor organisations to associate themselves with such work, as is done by the leaders of the Workers' Educational Association, I think they will prove to be wrong. In these days, when industrial warfare is intensifying, and the authority of leaders and "elected persons" is less than it has been, the impulse of the rank and file of the trade unions is more and more towards independence all round—in education, as in politics and industry. The best intelligences of the movement—those who are true successors of the early Radicals and Chartists—are suspicious of all co-operation with universities as "master-class institutions," and their energies are turning, in education matters, to the building up of such institutions as the Central Labor College. I believe few who realise the nature of the fight that lies before the democracy will fail to sympathise with this impulse, and see that it is a correct one.

Meanwhile, those who cannot abandon the idea of rendering the universities of service to the people will achieve their object soonest by helping to increase the volume of the demand for the absolute restoration of the means of education, in the great universities and public schools, to those for whom they are intended.

Yours,
A. H. M. Robertson
August 8th, 1911.

LABOUR PARTY POLICY (1)

Originally published in *The New Statesman* (11 October 1913): 15

Sir,—Few will deny that Mr. Ernest Thurtle's letter in your issue of October 4th is a striking contribution to the discussion on Labour policy, if only because it puts explicitly, and so explicitly as to give away completely, the argument of the little sect of anti-Parliamentarians who beset the Socialist and Labour movement just now.

Mr. Thurtle's claim—when his invective and imputation of corrupt motives to his opponents are dismissed—amounts simply to the demand that the "active rank and file," by which he means the minority who agree with him, should control and dictate to the "inert mass," as he calls the majority who disagree with him, and who on his own showing amount to "75 to 90 per cent." of the Trade Union movement.

No doubt Mr. Thurtle is an able and sincere propagandist, but how can he call himself a democrat passes my understanding.

It is all so very familiar—this specious exaltation of the "rank and file" as against the "officials." A little cross-examination invariably, as in Mr. Thurtle's case, resolves the so-called "rank and file" into the "active rank and file," and so into the 10 to 25 per cent. who happen to agree with the speaker! The rest are, of course, "inert" "sloppy," "corrupt," and all the other things the charity of the "democrat" in a hurry loves to impute.

I am aware, of course, that those who share my opinion are at a great disadvantage in facing the methods of controversy favoured by Mr. Thurtle. It is true, e.g., that I am that despised thing, a "middle-class Socialist," and have not the encyclopaedic knowledge of the working-class movement possessed by Mr. Thurtle. But I remain a human being, endowed, I hope, with a normal share of commonsense and logic, and have a right to an opinion equally with the esoteric devotees of the "active" 10 to 25 per cent. It may save your

correspondent and myself some waste of time if I add that I have no aspirations to a Parliamentary career.

Yours, A. H. M. Robertson.

TO THE EDITOR OF *THE NEW STATESMAN*

Originally published in *The New Statesman* (25 October 1913): 80

Sir,—I do not think the vote of the Miners' Federation, quoted by Mr. Gerald Gould, really damages my argument. I should very much doubt whether most of the 200,000 who voted against a political fund—still more whether the 400,000 abstainers—are "direct actionists." More likely they are old-fashioned Liberal or Conservative miners who object to the Labour Party as too Socialistic. If Chesterfield is any indication, there are more miners for whom the Labour Party is too advanced than who are too advanced for the Labour Party. For the rest, I am very glad that the Miners' Federation, notoriously suspect of "Lib.-Lab."-ism, should, as a matter of fact, have voted by a good majority for independent Labour representation.

I do not wish to be misunderstood, and I avow that with most of Mr. Gould's criticisms of the Labour Party in Parliament I agree. But I contend that the faults of the Labour Party are, as Mr. Schloesser and other sane political Socialists hold, the faults of the rank and file, and that the way to mend them is not a look for a rank-and-file uprising which will "make short work" of officials, still less to advocate the coercion of the majority by the minority, but to aim at the gradual conversion of the mass to the principle of independence of the older political parties which, in 1906, we mistakenly hoped that they had already learned.

Finally, I shall believe that anti-Parliamentarians are more than a little sect when their propaganda is evidenced by widespread abstention from voting at Parliamentary elections, and not while, as at present, the working class rush enthusiastically to record their votes for Unionist or Liberal candidates. That is not a convincing symptom of Syndicalism or anything else, except stupidity.

Yours,,
A. H. M. Robertson.

ATHEISM IN THE FRENCH REVOLUTION

Originally published in *The Freethinker* (13 May 1917): 302

Sir,—Mr. H. George Farmer criticizes my estimate of Hebert. I am grateful for his criticism, and may say at once that I shall be very glad if he can prove me wrong; for, being an Atheist myself, I do not like running down an Atheist, even when, as it seems to me, the facts compel me.

On one point, and one alone, Mr. Farmer "has" me. I have not seen an entire copy of the *Perc Duchesne*. It is not easy to see a copy of a periodical 123 years defunct, and I have had no time or opportunity to go to Paris and delve in the museums. If Mr. Farmer can put me in the way of inspecting a copy, either in the original or in the pages of an historian, I shall be obliged for his courtesy. As it is, I depend for my first-hand acquaintance with the *Perc Duchesne* on a few paragraphs culled from it by M. Aulard in his *Political History* of the Revolution. I must refer Mr. Farmer to this work, I the original French, and will only add that if the *Freethinker* habitually employed the English equivalents of some of the phrases customary with Hebert, it would be prosecuted by the police as an obscene publication.

Apart from these quotations, I am of course, dependent on historians; but I claim at least to have been discriminating in using them. I have said nothing as to the story of Hebert's having been dismissed from a situation for dishonesty before the Revolution, since I have preferred to suspend judgment on it, though I have seen no refutation of it in Aulard, Kropotkin, or any other pro-Revolutionary historian whom I have read. I have also refrained from making the usual capital out of the charge brought by Hebert against Marie Antoinette at her trial, since he seems to have had evidence to support it.

But the main count against Hebert is, in my opinion, that at the crisis of the Revolution, when the Democracy of France had to choose between the right and the wrong road, he threw his influence

violently into the wrong scale. I have pointed out that in November, 1793, the Government of France was fast becoming a savage tyranny, which punished not only acts, but even opinions with death. Every lightened man ought to have sought, as Danton did, to arrest this tendency. Hebert, on the contrary, sought to quicken it. An "easy-going man… too little in sympathy with the people to understand and to express the popular aspirations" (Kropotkin, *The Great French Revolution*, p. 501) Hebert went so far as to speak of an "itinerant guillotine" (p. 512); "to terrorise the enemies of the Revolution and to have the Government seized by his party seemed to him far more important than to solve the questions of food, the land, and organized labour" (p. 534); and his main anxiety seems to have been to get sixty-one Girondists guillotined whom the Government chose to spare (pp. 544–5). I am afraid that not even the most brilliant advocacy of Atheism would make such a man other than a "white elephant" to any cause he espoused.

That is the case against Hebert. I wait for Mr. H. George Farmer, counsel for the defence.

Robert Arch.

AGNOSTICISM AND MATERIALISM

Originally published in *The Literary Guide* (October 1921): 159

Mr. F. Sutherland, whose letter appears in the August *Guide*, asks "what particular evidence is required by Agnostics before they would venture to call themselves Materialists meaning by Materialism the theory that matter (that which occupies space) alone exists?" To convince me of the last-named proposition, Mr. Sutherland will have to produce evidence that perception, thought, and will (which do not occupy space) do not exist. I am afraid that in that case evidence itself will not exist, so he will find it a tough job!

I owe a reply to Mr. Charles E. Hooper, but I hardly think our differences justify the demands which another metaphysical article by me would make on your space and your readers' patience. Mr. Hooper asks me why I assume what makes an organism one to be something other than the organism itself. I reply that I cannot conceive of an organism, or anything else, as *causa sui*. Further, the fact that we can apprehend truths, and pursue ends, apart from our existence *qua* organisms proves, if proof be needed, that an organism is not self-existent. Behind the organism is the species, behind the species the genus, and behind the species and genus, in the last resort, is the ground of existence which Materialists call matter and Idealists call spirit, and which whatever you call it, "sleeps in the stone, dreams in the animal, and wakes in the man."

Robert Arch.

ERNEST BELFORT BAX: THINKER AND PIONEER

Originally published separately as a pamphlet by Hyndman Club and Institute, 1927. A short article summarizing these contents was published in *The Social-Democrat* (January 1927): 5.

[Editors: Much of this is just made up of quotes from Bax's works which Robertson endeavored to summarize for the public.]

If any reader of this pamphlet should happen never to have heard of Ernest Belfort Bax (a perfectly possible contingency, for his name was singularly little before the public), I will begin by reminding them that in George Bernard Shaw's preface to *Major Barbara* written in 1906, that author declares that he is indebted for his characteristic ideas to certain British authors, and asks why, if his critics must give the credit of his plays to a philosopher, they do not give it to an English philosopher, whom he names. That philosopher was Bax.

I. Early Life

Ernest Belfort Bax was born on July 23rd, 1854, in Leamington, of old-fashioned Nonconformist parents. In his *Reminiscences and Reflexions of a Mid and Late Victorian*, he describes the narrow Evangelicanism and Sabbatarianism in which he was brought up, and which, he says, "left an enduringly unpleasant reminiscence behind it," though he also says that theology never affected him very deeply. "I believed in it, of course, in a way, knowing nothing else, and hence it being the only theory of the universe available for my young intelligence. What interested me more than any maunderings anent the individual soul, being 'born again' and the like, was when my old governess, who took a truly maternal interest in me, used to talk to me about Daniel's image and its four monarchies. This gave me, in its way and within the limits of the current orthodox creed, a theory of history, such as it was, and I have always felt the need of an

intelligible doctrine of history." Bax adds that, though little affected by Christian dogma, he believed thoroughly as a child in the supernatural, and was dissatisfied with the assurances of his elders that assurances of his elders that miracles, though they had happened at the beginning of the Christian era, did not happen now.

Bax was privately educated, and come early under the influence of such writers as Lewes, Lecky, Bain, Spencer and Mill, which doubtless had the effect of reducing his supernaturalist leanings to a minimum. Certainly he was for the remainder of his life a robust and aggressive Rationalist. If his early bias in the other direction can be said to have left any trace, it is, in a curious belief, which he retained to the end of his days, in the workings in human affairs of an unaccountable and malicious element of luck or chance. Watertight against God, angel or devil, his Rationalism was never quite proof against a "Poltergeist."

Bax's interest in public affairs was awakened at the age of sixteen by the Franco-German War, and more particularly by its sequel, the Commune. His political ideas at this time amounted only to a commonplace Radicalism combined with vague aspirations to economic equality; but he became fired with sympathy for the working-class rising in Paris, and wept bitter tears over its suppression by the troops of Thiers and MacMahon. "Henceforward I became convinced that the highest and indeed only true religion for human beings was that which had for its object the devotion to the future social life of Humanity. The martyrs of the Commune who died, as one of them expressed it, *pour la solidarité humaine*, appealed to me as far nobler than any martyrs the Christian creed has had to show. The Communist believed that his end at the hands of the Versaillais soldiery meant the extinction of his personality, but perhaps a step towards the realisation of his ideal, and in this belief he faced death. The Christian martyr, on the other hand, we may presume, was sincerely convinced according to the tenets of his creed that his death at the hands of the executioner opened for his personality the gates of a paradise of never-ending bliss."

Bax later frequented the meetings of the Positivist Society, but never actually joined it. In 1875 he went to Germany to study music; and visited that country again in 1880 as Berlin correspondent of the *Standard*. This brought him into contact with Eduard von Hartmann, and with German philosophy in general. Henceforward Mill, Spencer and Bain yielded place to Kant and Hegel. After his return to England, Bax became associated from 1882 onwards with Hyndman and William Morris in the Socialist Movement; at first as a member of the Democratic (soon to become the Social-Democratic) Federation. After the breach between Morris and Hyndman in 1884 on a question of tactics, Bax worked for a period with Morris in the Socialist League, but returned to the Social-Democratic Federation in 1888, and never left it again. From this period to his death the history of Bax's life is mainly the history of his work as a philosopher, historian and publicist.

II. Bax as a Philosopher

I will deal first with his work as a philosopher. Bax's *Handbook to the History of Philosophy*, published in 1885 for Bohn's Philosophical Library, is, in my opinion, his best work in this field. Not only is his account of earlier philosophers readable and concise, affording to the beginner an admirable introduction to the subject, but the last part of the work contains the clearest statement of Bax's own position which he ever penned. His later philosophical writings, such as *The Real, the Rational and the Alogical*, do little more than develop that position. When Bax began to write, the English Hegelian movement, represented lay T.H. Green, Caird, Bradley and their company, was in its first vigour. That movement afforded to Bax a point of departure and an object of attack. But there was this difference between Bax and most other British philosophers. He had never studied or taught at a British University; and he had learnt German philosophy, not from English lecturers and tutors, but from the Germans at first hand. With the single exception of his friend Lord Haldane, no British thinker of his generation was so soaked in the

wisdom of Kant, Fichte and Hegel as Bax was. This had its advantages, but also its drawbacks. Firstly, through having his "spiritual home" in Germany, and through his manifold personal and cultural connections with that country, Bax never wholly acquired the art of expressing his philosophy in lucid English. *His Handbook to the History of Philosophy* is thus open to this criticism; his later philosophical works can be read, but they demand patience and application. Secondly, partly from this cause, and partly from the fact of not being a university man, he never won the recognition he deserved among English-speaking philosophers. Search the works of Bradley, Bosanquet, Schiller, James, Russell and the rest of the leading lights of modern British and American philosophy, and I doubt if a single reference will be found to the work of Bax, who was a thinker in no way inferior to any in the list. This had the effect of isolating and embittering him, and led him in later life to devote insufficient study to developments of thought which, on their merits, deserved his attention.

III. First Principles

The leading theme of debate in modern philosophy may be described, as follows. In ordinary life we assume that we have to do with things outside ourselves, which exist independently of us, and will continue existing without us. But to all appearance, our only source of knowledge concerning things is the impressions they make on us through our senses. Whatever, then, may be the case practically, can we be certain theoretically that we know anything except our impressions at this moment? Yet common sense and science, which is extended common sense, assure us, that we do: that, for example, there is an order of nature, that by appropriate action we can produce desired effects, and that seven and five always must and will make twelve. This ability of the human organism to attain knowledge far transcending itself constitutes the central puzzle of philosophy. Kant and his successors claimed to solve it by declaring that the power in us which knows things is, in some sense, one and the same in all

individuals, past, present and to come, and that what we can know consists of nothing else but its manifestation in innumerable individual lives. Hegel, whose metaphysics were much to the fore in the nineteenth century, identified this power with thought, and named it God.

Now Bax's philosophical writings are, from beginning to end, a protest against the Hegelian conception of the power behind the world as just thought. Bax adheres to the doctrine that the world consists of nothing else but manifestations of the same power which, in ourselves, is conscious. But he asks: "Does not consciousness presuppose *that which becomes* conscious?" In old-fashioned parlance, consciousness, or knowledge, or thought, is an attribute, not a substance. There can be no attribute without substance, no form without matter, no thought without something for thought to arise in. Bax credits Schopenhauer with having insisted, in opposition to Hegel, on the necessity of an "alogical," rather than a logical basis for the real world. The view which reduces reality to thought, or the Pallogist view as Bax calls it, "fails to render an, adequate account of.... the material element in experience. It has no satisfactory explanation to offer of *sense* and its conditions; it knows nothing, or it says nothing, of the *dynamis* of the world, of the *trieb*, the impulse, the will, the force, of empirical reality." Not the act of awareness itself, but the "ground" and "content" of awareness, is the subject-matter of philosophy. The act of knowing is, by the very nature of an act, finite; the ground or basis of all reality, therefore, cannot be the act of knowing. "This is traceable in ordinary empirical perception and thought. When we speak of the 'being' of an object, it is its alogical side, i.e., that side or aspect of its reality which is not in consciousness, which we primarily have in mind. The aspect that appears, that is actual or present in consciousness, is its phenomenon merely.... Given two sets of appearances (phenomena), the doctor at the foot of the bed, and the skeleton looking over his shoulder. The one is a reality, the other is an illusion. What is the ground of distinction between them except that the one has an unknown, unpresented, albeit knowable, presentable content, while the content

of the other is exhausted in the immediate act of perception?.... The fact that twenty patients in the same ward were simultaneously seized with the same illusion would not make that illusion any more of a reality than in the case of its only being perceived by one."

IV. Bax and the Idea of God

Bax therefore rejects the philosophical Theism of Berkeley, Green and other Idealists, according to which the external universe has its being solely as an object in the mind of God. "Mere actuality for, or presence in, another consciousness can never give the independence we predicate of external things or enter into any explanation of their meaning for our consciousness. An object does not exist more for me because I know that someone else perceives it; its perception and its being are always separate, alike in common sense and in scientific thought." But Bax's objections to Theism go deeper than this. "The real, the vital difference between the point of view of the Theist and that of the Atheist lies not in any theoretical equivoque, but in the practical sphere of ethics.... Granting [the Atheist says] the existence of your Supreme Being, the mere fact of the presence of evil, misery and pain in the world is incompatible with the moral attributes, if we use the word 'moral' in any intelligible sense, of the Creator and Orderer of such a world.... No amount of specious confidence-trick assurances of mysterious 'divine purposes' behind it will divest it of its character as evil.... Necessary thought it may be in human affairs not altogether to exclude the admission of the end justifying the means.... how inconceivably less is the excuse for a Divine Being whose powers, if not amounting to actual omnipotence, must nevertheless, as compared with human powers, be hardly distinguishable therefrom, and who works not in a limited tithe, but has eternity to play with! .... The true Atheist, the ethical Atheist, who insists that the Theist's, assumption of a personal Deity, even if granted as regards the question of bare existence, is worthless for religious purposes, owing to its incompatibility with ethical principle, might also he described with equal accuracy as an anti-Theist." Once,

however, we drop the ascription of personality to the Absolute, and postulate only a "Life Force," persistently tending to self-realisation infinite personalities, the existence of evil ceases to be a metaphysical problem at all.

V. Honour Where Honour is Due

The high-and-dry Hegelianism which was enthroned in 1885, and against which Bax directed his polemic, fell to pieces in the ensuing twenty years. Of this movement Bax was the unacknowledged forerunner. His theory was given to the public in 1885—before Bergson's "élan vital" and before Mr. Shaw's Life Force appeared on the scene. But I have never yet seen a history of modern philosophy in which honour is given where honour is due.

VI. Bax and Christian Ethics

His metaphysic has important practical consequences. The abandonment of Christian theology inevitably involves the supersession of Christian morality. The latter, like the former, is based on a fundamental opposition between God and the world, spirit and matter, the Supernatural and the natural, soul and body, duty and happiness. Its watchword, first and last, is "mortify your members which are upon the earth." But whereas Christian philosophy is Dualistic, Bax's philosophy is Monistic. It is for those who no longer recognise the distinction between God and the world, or between man and nature, to seek, by means of a "categorical imperative" or otherwise, to preserve the shadow of a moral code whose sole *raison d'être* resided in those distinctions. The essence of morality as social, says Bax, is the realisation of the needs of the social whole of which the individual is part. The code, therefore, to which the individual is required to conform depends on the social environment at the time in which he lives. Our only criterion of the intrinsic worth of an action is its compatibility with the free development of ourselves or others. "The highest end of action consists in the removal of the impediments

in the way of that free development – in other words, in that which tends to the greatest possible satisfaction of the immediate wants and aspirations of all men." This agrees, it will be noted, with Mr. Bertrand Russell's definition of the good life as that in which the greatest number of desires are satisfied. "Freedom," continues Bax, "which implies the satisfaction of existent want for each and for all – first and foremost the animal wants the introspectivist disdains—is the first condition of that higher social life which is the furthest visible summit of progress.... This point of view in its own way demands in a sense the sacrifice, the negation, of the individual, but it is not as with the introspective religions, the first step in a circular process which begins with the natural individual, and ends with the apotheosised individual, and hence which, its primary negation of the individual notwithstanding, remains individualistic; but a negation of the individual only in so far as this is essential to the realisation of that higher social whole into which he enters. In short, the abnegation of self becomes, on this view a mere accident of morality, and not, as before, a part of its substance." In "A Socialist's Notes on Practical Ethics," an essay included in the collection entitled *Outlooks from the New Standpoint*, Bax resolves the whole of morality, broadly into two propositions: "(1) Every act necessarily involving cruelty is *per se* immoral. (2) No act not necessarily involving cruelty is *per se* immoral." This is illustrated later by a crucial example. For Christian morality "the sexual relation is *per se* immoral, and only becomes moral *per accidens*, i.e., under a special condition imposed from without." For Bax, sex is "*per se* morally indifferent (neither moral nor immoral) like any other bodily function, but it may easily become immoral *per accidens*, i.e., from the special circumstances under which it takes place, and whereby it acquires the character of an act of injustice or treachery." Elsewhere Bax points out that man's good qualities, "sympathy, love, friendship, generosity, good-heartedness, all have their root in the animal life." Although there are circumstances in which we may be called upon to face pain or death for our fellows, such self-sacrifice is never an *end,* but at most a *means*. The "destruction of the old kinship of tribe and clan," and

the rise of individualism, caused the social bearing of all ethics to be lost sight of, and led people to regard pain, want and "holiness" as good in themselves. But with the decay of supernaturalism, and the growth of a concrete social morality whose full fruition is yet to come, we gradually awake to new kinship, not of tribe or clan but of humanity. "The fallacy of the Christian apotheosis of pain becomes apparent. The only meaning the word Evil has is that of pain, want and suffering.... The most important ideal with which the modern man can concern himself is connected with the social life round him.... Good material conditions are the basis of all that is, truly speaking, higher life."

VII. What is Our Destiny

Bax's philosophy is rounded off by a speculation in which I believe he can claim complete originality. Life has evolved continuously from the protozoic cell to the human form with its centralised brain and nervous system. Parallel with life, consciousness has evolved from the mere sentiency we may suppose to accompany cell-life to the self-conscious human being. Now Bax, following Herbert Spencer, regards human society, with its economic and political interdependence, as a form of organism to which individual human beings stand in the same relation as the cells composing the body stand to the body. But Bax goes further than Spencer. As consciousness is correlated with physical life from the cell to the human being, he asks whether the emergence of the social organism as a higher evolutionary type does not involve, as a corollary, the emergence of a corporate consciousness in human society. True, we cannot *imagine* to ourselves such a corporate social mind. But neither could a particular cell in any organism represent to itself the centralised individual consciousness that develops with the brain. "Should the foregoing be true," says Bax, "it may be that we shall have to seek our 'God,' if he is to be a practical ideal, not so much in the realm of metaphysical analysis as in that of speculative sociological research, or, as we may term it, in *transcendental*

sociology." He finds in the moral consciousness, in religious aspiration, in crowd psychology, and in the phenomena of telepathy, so far as they may be genuine, indications of the ultimate emergence of a consciousness transcending the individual, as the individual transcends the cell. Parallel speculations to this will be found in Mr. Edward Carpenter's "Art of Creation," in Mr. Wells's "God, the Invisible King," and in Professor Alexander's "Space, Time and Deity." But here, as elsewhere, Bax can claim to have been first in the field.

VIII. Bax as a Historian

Bax records in his *Reminiscences* that he always felt, from childhood on, the need of an intelligible doctrine of history. The view of history which he eventually adopted bears, as we might expect, a strong impress of Hegelian philosophy. He was also influenced by his Socialist masters, Marx and Engels (who also, it will be recalled, took Hegel as their point of departure), though he never accepted the "Materialist Conception of History" as a sufficient explanation of the whole course of events. In the essay on "Universal History from a Socialist Standpoint," which stands first in the volume entitled *The Religion of Socialism*, published in 1886, we have a *resumé* of his general theory. Human society starts with primitive Communism, in which the individual is completely identified with his group, his attitude to the world about him is naively animistic, and the opposition, between man and the State, and between nature and mind, which characterise civilised life and thought, have not emerged. Civilisation begins with the introduction of agriculture, and is marked as the centuries proceed by the growth of inventions, the improvement of lethal weapons, and the aggregation of tribes for defensive purposes into city-States, and of cities into kingdoms. In the course of this process, primitive Communism has given way to a class society, with slavery at its base and a hierarchy of castes above it, as in Egypt and the Asiatic Empires of antiquity. With the disappearance of the old solidarity of the tribe, and the growth of

opposition between individuals and between classes, religion also becomes less social and more personal, as in the Greek mystery-cults and the later philosophers. The process culminated in the Roman Empire, which brought with it the final submersion of group solidarities in one gigantic system of exploitation based on slavery, the complete divorce of the individual from the life of the State, the ever-increasing vogue of other-worldly religions, and eventually the establishment of Christianity. So "the twilight of ancient civilisation gradually deepened into darkness."

Bax regards the Middle Ages as the product of interaction between the Roman world, with its servile basis and its other-worldly religion, on the one hand, and the German tribes with their relatively primitive culture on the other. Consequently we have on the one side feudalism, chivalry, and the semi-pagan outlook of popular Catholicism, and on the other the asceticism and self-mortification of the religious enthusiasts. From the thirteenth century on, industry and commerce began to revive and we have the germ of modern capitalism in the opposition between the close guild-corporations and the labourers outside them. The Reformation represents the revolt of the rising middle classes against a Church tradition and organisation which hampered their interests. In Protestantism, with its doctrine of salvation by faith alone, its sharp separation of sacred and secular, and its tacit relegation of religion, for practical purposes, to one day in seven, the bourgeois on the make found a creed after its own heart. All political developments since the Reformation—the growth of the modern State, the struggle for world-empire, the freeing of commerce from feudal restrictions—are simply so many phases of capitalist evolution, culminating in the age in which Bax writes. "Here the antitheses, latent in primitive human society, for the first time reach their fullest development." The oppositions between individual and social interest, between material and spiritual, between politics and ethics, attain their apogee. And "now that the fruit of individualism is plucked, by the virtual admission of every thinking person, whether Socialist or not, it is but Dead Sea fruit after all.... Individualism has no sooner shaken itself free from the supports which, though they

may have cumbered it in its advance, yet did at last keep it from falling; it has no sooner realised itself, than its death-knell is rung, and it finds itself strangled by the very economical revolution which had rendered its existence possible.... The majority are the slaves of modem Industrialism. Individualism, therefore, for the majority has become a meaningless phrase." The history of civilisation, in a word, is the history of the struggles of class, creed and nationality. These, antagonisms must, in the next stage, find their solution in Hegelian fashion in a new synthesis, in which the characteristics of primitive society, Communism and solidarity, are reaffirmed on a higher plane—on an international, instead of a tribal basis.

Holding such a view as this, Bax was naturally interested in every period of history, ancient and modem, in which the drama could be discerned unfolding. His main work, however, was concerned with two special periods, the German Reformation and the French Revolution. He devotes to antiquity only an occasional brief essay—a curious and regrettable fact, especially is he was wont to say that, had he been able to choose (from the standpoint of personal enjoyment) a period of history in which to be born, he would have chosen the life of a cultured Greek or Roman of the age of the Antonines.

IX. "The Rise and Fall of the Anabaptists"

Bax's work on "The Social Side of the Reformation in Germany" is extremely readable; for Bax, when writing history, is as lucid as, when writing philosophy, he is the reverse. The work is in three Volumes: *German Society at the Close of the Middle Ages*, *The Peasants' War in Germany*, and *The Rise and Fall of the Anabaptists*. There is a certain irony in the fact that Bax chose for sympathetic historical treatment the sixteenth century sect who were the lineal ancestors, with all their obvious differences, of the Baptists in whose narrow-ness, as we have seen, so embittered his own early youth. Anabaptism, however, was the same sort of bugbear to the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries as Jacobinism was to the early nineteenth,

and as Bolshevism is to-day. Bax writes accordingly with real gusto the epic of this sect who, originating merely as the "left wing" of the Zwinglian Reformation in Switzerland, at first preached and practised absolute non-resistance, but who, driven to fury by the savage cruelty with which they were persecuted, resorted to secular weapons, became masters for over a year of the Westphalian city of Munster, and, after a desperate siege by the Bishop of that place, were put down with the ferocity common in sixteenth-century religious warfare. The movement, Bax points out, was essentially the effect of the uncritical reading of Luther's translation of the Bible on a class full of resentment at economic injustice. "Those who look forward," he concludes, "to a higher and better organisation of society in our time no longer have visions of a 'New Jerusalem,' of a divine 'Millennial Kingdom' brought about by the dispensation of a supernatural Providence.... Thomas Münzer, Jan of Leyden, Jan Matthys; and the rest of those who sought the revindication of social justice in the early sixteenth century, have, together with their aspirations, passed away for ever. But foolish as their ideas seem to us to-day, who regard the problem from so totally different a standpoint, let us not forget that with all their follies and shortcomings, they were, in a sense, the forerunners of modern Socialism, and, as such, let us spare them a passing tribute of recognition!"

X. The French Revolution

The French Revolution is a period on which it is even less possible to write impartially than on the Reformation. The Revolution cut in every Western country deep and lasting fissures, which constitute the dividing lines between political parties to this day. The Tory historian of the present day, who feels himself the apostolic successor of Pitt, Canning and Castlereagh, blackens to the best of his ability the men of the Revolution whom they fought. On the other hand Radicals like Morley, and still more Socialists like Bax, are bound by political affiliation to take a sympathetic view. Nothing is more deceitful, nothing more dangerous than the pretence of impartiality in modern

history, for the pretence can never become a reality. Let us respect and welcome, therefore, the historian who announces his bias in advance, and, without suppressing or falsifying, writes firmly from a "point of view." He, at least, is honest.

Bax's works on the Revolution are able, painstaking and, in essentials, trustworthy. The short "Story of the French Revolution" appeared in 1889 as a series of centenary articles in *Justice*, the organ of the Social-Democratic Federation, and was published in book form the following year. It is avowedly a "description of the main events .... from the point of view of Modern Socialism." The view taken is summed up on the opening page. "The cardinal idea of the French Revolution was the political emancipation of the middle-class." Yet, although this was the central idea, "there were issues raised—and not merely raised, but carried for the time being—which went far beyond this. But the flood-tide of the Revolution did not represent the permanent gain of progress. The waters receded from the ground touched at the height of the crisis, leaving the enfranchisement of the bourgeoisie as the one achievement permanently effected." The permanent work of the revolution, Bax points out, was done in its first three years. France became "for good or evil, a united nationality. The power of the clergy, and noblesse was completely broken. Judicial torture and breaking on the wheel were absolutely done away with.... In addition, the 'goods' of the clergy and of the 'emigrant' nobility, were declared confiscated. The interesting point, as yet unsolved was, who should get this precious heritage, the 'nationalised' lands, houses and movable possessions of the recalcitrant first and second estates?" Under the Convention an attempt was made to legislate in the interests of the working-class, e.g., by the law of "maximum" and the progressive income-tax, with the result that, as Carlyle puts it in a sentence quoted with approval by Bax, "there is no period to be met with in which the general 25,000,000 of France suffered less than in this period, which they name reign of terror." "For the first time in history," says Bax, "the cry for material and social equality as opposed to mere political and legal equality became definitely articulate. That cry has often enough since been smothered, but has

always made itself heard again at short intervals. The party of the Mountain and the Jacobins, the Baboeuf conspiracy, the Chartist movement, the days of June, 1848, the Commune of 1871, are all so many stages in the awakening of the Proletariat to the full consciousness of itself which it attains in modern Socialism." But the ebb-tide set in. The lands of the Church and the emigrés were sold to speculators and army, contractors instead of to the poorer peasants; the "new class of thieves" thus enriched became the lords of France, and proceeded to re-establish "the hearth, the throne, and the altar.... on a new basis"—that of the military dictatorship of Napoleon.

XI. Bax on Robespierre

Certain subsidiary features of Bax's revolutionary, history remain to be noticed. One is his emphatic repudiation of the attempts sometimes made by advanced writers to whitewash the character of Robespierre. Bax will have none of him. Robespierre is "a prig, and a repulsive prig at that," whose "murder of friends like Danton and Desmoulins, with whom he had lived and worked on terms of close intimacy since the beginning of the Revolution, yields to nothing in history, for its treachery and infamy." Bax's closing character sketch of Robespierre is striking. His inordinate ambition, says Bax, "was partly owing to the fact that he was undeniably a man without a vice (in the ordinary sense of the word). Now, only, very exceptional men can afford to be without the ordinary vices of mankind, and Robespierre was certainly not one of these men. With his ascetic Rousseauite notions of Republican austerity, he had suppressed his natural appetites, the consequence being that all the morbid elements in his character, having no other outlet, ran into the channel of self-idolatry and morbid ambition. The first condition of a well-regulated man is to know how to properly distribute the *quantum* of vice with which a bountiful nature has endowed him. A false morality teaches him to suppress it. But this he can seldom do, and if he succeeds, it is at the expense of all or much that is distinctive in his character. In tearing off the coating of vice, he tears of his skin with it. The usual case,

however, is that the vice is not got rid of at all, but only forced into some out-of-the-way channel. And wherever vice is concentrated, it is bad. When all the vice of a character is focussed on any single one of the natural appetites a man becomes a sot, a satyr, a glutton, a confirmed gambler, etc. Now Robespierre sat upon all the usual valves. He and his ascetic hand poured scorn on the Hébertists and the Dantonists alike for their 'looseness' of their lives. But having closed up all the ordinary exits, his vice came out none the less, but concentrated in the form of a truculent, remorseless ambition, unparalleled in history." Bax, so often an unaccredited pioneer, and writing in 1889, anticipates here the doctrine of psycho-analysis.

XII. "Marat, the People's Friend"

His revolutionary hero is Marat, a forerunner of modern Socialism, whom four generations of capitalist historians have combined to vilify, and to whose biography he devotes a separate volume. This was first published in 1878, and was Bax's first work; but it was reissued in an enlarged form in 1900. The book is well documented, and the most readable of all his historical works, written as it is throughout *con amore*. Bax contends in the preface that "the verdict of the 'world' on a public character, as well as on moral worth in general and its opposite, like the public opinion of the 'world' on other matters, represents, as a rule, simply and solely, the verdict of class-prejudice and ignorance.... It is, in fact, a fairly safe plan to ascertain for oneself 'what most people think' on such questions, and then assume the opposite to be true. The result is a good working hypothesis, which remains, of course, to be possibly modified or even abandoned by subsequent investigations, but which is generally the nearest approach to truth we can make in the absence of the requisite knowledge for forming an unbiassed judgment. Acting on this principle, the very extravagance of abuse with which Marat had been assailed suggested to me the probability that an exceptionally noble and disinterested character lay behind it." Those who read the book must, at least, agree that Bax puts up a spirited defence of "the best-

abused man in modern history," and convicts the orthodox, academic view of gross one-sidedness. Space forbids me to quote more than one passage from the body of the book, which illustrates Bax's method of attack on the class-bias of the ordinary historian. He is dealing with the September massacres, which Marat, though he did not plan them, certainly justified after the event. "Who were these," asks Bax, "at most a thousand odd, 'victims' of popular justice?.... They were almost entirely the noble and the wealthy, and the hangers-on of the noble and the wealthy; most if not all of them had been, directly or indirectly, conspiring to reinstate the deposed King with the aid of an invading army; prepared avowedly not merely to destroy the newly-won liberty, but to take the lives of all republicans, and, indeed, of all who deprecated a return to the old oppression and corruption. Such as these it was for whom it has been the endeavour of prejudiced historians to excite the sympathy of subsequent generations. From the Paris of 1792 to the Paris of 1871 is a far cry, but let us compare notes. In the Paris of 1871 there were also massacres, not of a thousand odd, but of a number variously estimated at from twenty to thirty thousand. Here in the enormous majority of cases there was not even the semblance of a trial. In the latter case there was no imminent danger, no army marching on Paris, no plotters inside the city in collusion with that army, but a movement that had been hopelessly crushed.... Who were the twenty or thirty thousand victims of 1871? Almost wholly workmen, partisans of a cause avowedly hostile to wealth and privilege, and therefore hated by wealth and privilege. Herein lies the ground of divergence in the world's judgment of the two events. If 'the world' would only be candid in the matter, and avow openly that it likes well-to-do Royalist plotters and dislikes Proletarian insurgents, we should know where we were, and the issue would at least be clear. But he who with canting hypocrisy pretends *on moral grounds* to denounce Marat and his colleagues, without denouncing Thiers and the scoundrels who carried out his policy, in terms a hundredfold as severe, convicts himself of being a conscious humbug upon whom argument would be wasted."

XIII. The Value of Bax's Historical Work

Socialists are often reproached with having "no historical sense" by sentimental reactionaries with a veneer of antiquarian learning. He who has fortified himself with a course of Bax's historical works can afford to laugh that taunt to scorn. To one whose mind has been freed from the economic superstitions of capitalism, but who still distrusts Socialism as savouring too much of Utopia, Bax's essay, for example, on "Universal History from a Socialist Standpoint" (in *The Religion of Socialism*) can be warmly recommended. The longer historical books are not only simply and, arrestingly written studies of their respective subjects, but serve to awaken the modern Socialist to a feeling of solidarity with the past of his own movement, and to create a revolutionary "historical sense" with which to confound the reactionary antiquarian.

XIV. Bax as a Publicist

Bax became in 1892 Editor of *Justice*, the organ of the Social-Democratic Federation, but resigned before long for private reasons. Partly in collaboration with William Morris or Hyndman, but more often independently, he published numerous books, essays and articles on current affairs from the Socialist standpoint as he conceived it.

Socialism, to Bax, was not a mere economic or political programme, but a comprehensive religion, intimately bound up with his whole philosophy and his reading of history, and absolutely incompatible with orthodox ethics, patriotism, or Christianity. His view of life was an undivided whole. Hence he knew not the meaning of compromise or diplomatic statement. It was as impossible for him to pay lip-service to the British Empire or the Christian religion for the sake of making a proselyte, or conciliating an opponent, as it would have been for an early Christian to throw incense on the altar of the Roman Emperor. Socialism—revolutionary, international and

Atheistic—was his Gospel; patriotism, and established religion were part and parcel of bourgeois ideology. He is not, therefore, a good exponent of Socialism to recommend to the "man in the street," though to one who has already, on grounds of his own, rejected Christianity, and who wants a religion consonant with modern ideas, Bax may prove—as he did to me—an inspiring teacher.

XV. Early Impossibilism

If the Bolshevik seizure of power in Russia had occurred in the eighteen-eighties, Bax would without doubt have warmly supported it. In 1886, in the volume entitled "The Religion of Socialism," he pours scorn on majority rule. The majority, he says, are the thralls of capitalism; without leisure or education, they are necessarily the dupes of middle class economists and politicians, even where they are nominally "free." Necessarily, therefore, under the capitalist system the majority will vote for the main tenance of that system, not because they love it, but because they are, in present parlance, "doped." Only an active minority, therefore, will effect the revolution. The Socialist must ignore the opinion of the majority, which is the opinion of the capitalists and the masses they mislead, and must override it by any and every means open to him. As to patriotism, for the Socialist frontiers do not exist; love of country, as such, is not nobler than love of class. The policy of the international Socialist "must be to break up these hideous race monopolies called empires, beginning in each case at home"; to welcome everything which makes for the disruption of the empire to which he belongs; to urge on any movement tending to dislocate the commercial relations of the world; and to unite in a solid front the various national sections of the international Socialist party on the basis of firm and equal friendship

This, be it noted, was written over thirty years before Lenin installed himself in the Kremlin. It sounds, except in the last particular, almost like a prophecy. The main weakness in the argument is the assumption that all existing States are a homogeneous

mass of reaction, impermeable to Socialist "peaceful penetration," and the neglect of the important gains which the Working class—in some countries more than others—have made under democratic forms.

XVI. Why Bax was not a Bolshevik

Naturally Bax, in common with practically all Radicals and Socialists, was a pro-Boer in the war of 1899-1902, brought about, as he and they considered it to be, by the intrigues of a gang of financial capitalists, the mining magnates of Johannesburg and London. The outbreak of the Great War in 1914 led him to a certain modification of his attitude, which only superficial minds will regard as a recantation. It amounted really to the rounding-off of a position which before had been logically incomplete. To appreciate better the significance of this reorientation of view, and the real mental grit involved in making it, let us remember that Bax's "spiritual home" was in Germany; that Hegel was his master in philosophy, and Marx and Engels his masters in economics; that his visits to that country were frequent, and his friendships there many; that his second wife was a German; and that, when the Great War broke out, he was sixty years old. Anyone, in the circumstances, might have forgiven Bax for taking a Pacifist, if not a positively pro-German line. His actual attitude was quite the contrary, and yet not inconsistent with his fundamental principles. All his old revolutionary fury surged up, this time, against the military monarchies of Central Europe who had let loose Armageddon. As he had denounced the aggression of his own country against the Boer Republics, so now, with perfect consistency, he denounced the aggression of Germany and Austria, and would have no part or lot with those British Socialists who, from mere "anti-patriotic bias," as he put it, were led to favour peace at any price with Prussian despotism. The change, however, was not due to any softening towards British Imperialism. In his view, the Entente Powers were acting simply in the capacity of an international police force to punish crime and aggression; and he urged "all friends of

progress and peace" to see that European democracy was not cheated by any secret understanding among the governing classes into allowing the survival of Prussia as an independent military power.

This attitude, which Bax took up in common with Hyndman and other veterans of the Social-Democratic Federation, necessarily affected his view of the Bolshevist Revolution when it came. The Great War had taught Bax that a straight line is not always the shortest distance between two political points. The fact that the Bolsheviks, by drawing Russia out of the war, were in effect prolonging the life of the reactionary Central Empires against whom, in Bax's view, the war was justly, waged, made it impossible for him to support Bolshevism. He was further alienated by the cruelties of the Soviet Government towards its political opponents, particularly its Socialist opponents, and by its wanton invasion and conquest of Georgia. Yet, in conversations with Bax towards the end of his life, one felt that he was never extreme in his condemnation, and that the Soviet war on Christianity, at any rate, had his whole-hearted sympathy. The logic of events alone prevented him, as it should have prevented others, from being a Bolshevik.

XVII. Anti-Feminism

Bax was always hostile to the claims of women to equal rights with men in politics and in the professions. On this subject he was opposed to the overwhelming majority of Socialists both here and abroad, and his attitude, extraordinarily bitter as it was, alienated many, and maimed his otherwise magnificent work. His earliest published utterance on the subject (in "The Religion of Socialism," 1886) is a comparatively temperate statement. At one time, says Bax, the claim to equality amounted to a legitimate movement for the removal of certain undoubted grievances. But for some time past the tendency of legislation and sentiment has been, under the pretext or equality, to confer privileges on women at the expense of men. Various instances are adduced in support of this contention, e.g., the Married Women's Property Act protects the property of a wife from spoliation by her

husband, while notwithstanding this, the husband is liable for his wife's debts and torts, and is obliged, moreover, to maintain her however flagrant may be her unworthiness. Feminist sentiment, according to Bax, is responsible for the infliction of the punishment of flogging on men for certain forms of sexual misconduct, while at the same time exempting women in any circumstances from similar punishment. As long as women enjoy such privileges, he argues, their claim to political equality with men is nothing short of an addition of insult to injury. Nevertheless, in the early passage I am quoting, Bax looks forward to the realisation, under Socialism, of a "real equality between the sexes," based on the economic, independence of women, as opposed to the "sham equality" of present-day society, which really amounts to the subjection of men.

In Bax's later pronouncements on this question, all saving clauses and qualifications are thrown to the winds. In his later years he seems to have systematically searched the police-court and other news for instances of real or imaginary injustice to men in the interests of women. As a result, he produces a cumulative indictment of judges, juries, magistrates and legislators which, if taken at its face value, would force us to the conclusion that these makers and administrators of the law—most of whom, strange to say are themselves men—are in a nefarious conspiracy to grind the male sex under the tyrannical high heel of the feminine boot. Men are flogged; women are not. The seduction by a man of a girl under sixteen is a criminal offence; the seduction by a women of a boy under that age is not. A man convicted of murder is usually hanged, especially if the victim be a woman; a murderess is almost invariably reprieved. And this intellectually inferior sex, rolling in privilege, injustice and oppression, have the impudence to treat it as a grievance that they are unable to vote on the same terms as men

XVIII. What Bax Failed to See

An adequate criticism of the foregoing argument would take too long. A just review of the case would, I think, take note of the following

considerations. Firstly, the fact that nature lays upon women the whole burden of bearing and rearing the next generation makes it in no way anomalous, but merely just that the law, in so far as it affects sex as such, should take special account of women's natural disabilities. The distinction between the case of the two sexes as regards, e.g., the age of consent should have been obvious to Bax. Quite apart from the objections to premature sexual experience which apply to both sexes alike, a young girl seduced by a man is exposed to the risk of bearing an illegitimate child, and consequently (under present conditions) to pains and penalties in the shape of social opprobrium which have no counterpart in the case of a boy. Differential legislation for the sexes in such matters as this does not justify the charge of sex-privilege. As regards the incidence of the criminal law on the two sexes, it is surprising that Bax should have failed to see that the exemption of women from flogging, for example, is due to the average male legislator's aversion (rooted, of course, in the sexual instinct) to the idea of flogging the opposite sex, and not to any specific *feminine* demand for exemption. His polemic on the subject, however, has the merit of at least forcing one to think, and will have served a good purpose if it converts any men, who object on instinctive grounds to hanging and flogging women, into consistent opponents of the judicial murder and torture of any human being regardless of sex.

Secondly, while it is probable that the *average* woman is inferior in brain-power to the *average* man, it is not true that *every* woman is inferior to *every* man. The abilities of each sex vary enormously. We might roughly state the fact by saying that the abilities of men range from 0 to 100, and the abilities of women from 0 to 80. To admit *any and every* man to the practice of the professions and the exercise of political functions, while excluding *any and every* woman, would therefore be not only an unjust, but a socially wasteful policy, amounting to a refusal to make the best use of the talents at the disposal of the community, which could not he justified

by the mere fact of inequality between the average abilities of the two sexes.[7]

Thirdly, Bax shows himself singularly unphilosophical in ignoring the economic roots of modern Feminism, and in treating it as an unaccountable perversity introduced among us, presumably, from the nether pit. He should have realised that industrialism, by breaking up the old system of domestic industry and forcing women, as well as men, into the labour market, is the real driving force of Feminism. For a Socialist, who believes in united working-class activity against capitalism, to attempt to deny woman their share in that activity is grotesque. Women are in the industrial and political movements by force of circumstances; and one may say to the anti-feminist in the words of Scripture: "Except these abide in the ship, ye cannot be saved."

XIX. Conclusion

After the publication of his *Reminiscences* in 1918, Bax wrote little. *The Real, the Rational and the Alogical*, published in 1920, and the essay contributed by him to Professor J.H. Muirhead's symposium of *Contemporary British Philosophy* in 1924, were recapitulations of his philosophical position, to which little was added. Occasional articles from his pen still appeared in *Justice*, the *Literary Guide*, and the *Freethinker*. But his work was past. His annual visits to England in the summer months were spent in *rendezvous*, chiefly at the National Liberal Club, with his circle of friends, conversation and discussion with whom delighted him to the end. Though he could be truculent with his pen, he was personally the most gentle and unassuming of men, and displayed an engaging

[7] Editors: Here Robertson simply failed to criticize his teacher far enough and took far too much the ideas of the time that women were inherently intellectually inferior in some capacity to men or that men had a greater range of intellect available to them. A more structured analysis would tell him that this was because of differing education, where women were suppressed in education (and are to this day) more than men are, thus, the difference in intellect is completely illusory. Robertson failed to see through the illusion in these early years.

interest in the ideas even of the youngest of us. In 1925 his services to philosophy were recognised by a public dinner at which Lord Haldane presided, and which was attended by a large company of Bax's admirers. But the end was nearer than any of us suspected. The health of his wife caused him increasing anxiety; and in the autumn of 1926 it became necessary to move her to a nursing-home in South London. Deprived of the kindly care that had sustained his declining years, Bax was soon to join her in death. A chance misadventure on his part led to blood-poisoning; and on November 26th both husband and wife passed away.

So ended the life and work of Ernest Belfort Bax. Even more than when he began to write it is evident to-day that the world is in the midst of a social, political and. religious revolution equalled in importance only by that which culminated 1,600 years ago in the establishment of Christianity. From that epoch to the present, we have been taught that the whole function of the ordinary man or woman is to suffer evil and injustice patiently in this world with a view to compensation in a hypothetical future life. The religious synthesis of to-morrow, which Bax believed would supersede Christianity in name and fact, and which will assuredly supersede in fact what has passed in history under that name, will recognise human happiness, not in a hypothetical world to come, but in this world here and now, as the only worthy object of our common endeavour. This is the religion of Socialism, as Bax preached it; and, although the political and economic path to its fulfilment may be more devious than he sometimes supposed, he will be remembered hereafter as one who never lost the assurance, in the words of Thomas Hardy:

"That the rages
Of the ages
Shall be cancelled, and deliverance offered from the darts that were,
Consciousness the Will informing, till It fashion all things fair!"

F. J. GOULD AND FASCISMO

Originally published in *The Social Democrat* (May 1927): 12

Dear Comrade,—I am in cordial agreement with the notes in your April issue on "Fascism and Pacifism" and "Playing the 'Duce' in Europe." I rub my eyes, however, when I turn over the page and find our friend Gould devoting his column to a sympathetic plea for the "Duce," his works and ways.

Gould refers to the fiasco of the seizure of the factories by Italian workers in 1919–20; but he does not add, what Wickham Steed and other competent observers have pointed out, that Mussolini and the Fascisti at the time actually *supported* that misguided policy, and that not until it had failed by its own futility, and not until Italy was already on the sway to stabilisation, did Mussolini and his precious ex-Reds out of a job carry out their march on Rome, and "restore order"—save the mark!—in the interests of capitalism.

Worse still, Gould classes Matteotti, the murdered Social-Democrat, and as much a martyr for Socialism as Jaurès[8] or Karl Liebknecht, as a "Liberal politician."

He says that "Italy is rid of confusion and riot." No doubt "order reigns" in Florence and Milan, as it once reigned in Warsaw—history knows how! "The Catholic religion is imparted in all schools." *Bellissimo*! I try to remember that Gould was once a fellow-Rationalist as well as a fellow-Socilaist but he makes it hard. He finally pleads for "understanding" instead of "hissing and nose-upturning." But I fancy when it is a question of Moscow and Bolshevism, instead of Rome and Fascism, Gould is all for "hissing," and we don't hear so much of "understanding." Yet Fascism is only inverted Bolshevism. Why should young comrades be asked to "understand" one, and warned against the other?

[8] Editors: Jean Jaurès a heterodox "Marxist" who was assassinated at the outbreak of WWI whose death helped destabilize the French government.

RIDICULE AND CONTEMPT

Originally published in *The New Statesman* (7 May 1927): 111

Sir,—To parody Clausewitz, "Politics are civil war, carried on under another name and by other methods." The blackleg—and, indeed, the Tory working man in general—is as justly an object of "ridicule and contempt" to his fellow-workmen as were the conscientious objector and the pro-German to most of the nation in the late war. Coming from politicians who supported conscription, the talk about "Trade Union tyranny" and "intimidation" is disgusting cant. As one of those who reluctantly supported the war—and its attendant coercive measures—in the interests (as they rightly or wrongly deemed) of democracy and progress, I should count myself a coward if I did not support my Trade Union fellow-citizens in their war against the exploiting classes, and in its attendant coercive measures against the traitors in their ranks.

Yours,
Robert Arch.
13 Laurel Road.
S.W. 20.

CORRESPONDENCE (1)

Originally published in *The Social-Democrat* (August 1927): 8

[Editors: We find this writing particularly important in showing that Robertson at this point was still against Soviet socialism, but also unlike his Social Democratic friends, unwilling to betray them for fascism which he rightfully regarded as an objectively worse threat.]

Dear Comrade,—I am unable to follow Gould in his distinction between "Socialism in the S.D.F. sense" and Socialism in general.[9] A Social-Democrat, to me, means simply a democrat who is a Socialist; and Matteotti was both. Gould apparently calls him a Liberal because another Italian who admired him, also admired Herbert Spencer! Well, I am sorry to shock our friend Gould, but I also admire Herbert Spencer, though I disagree with his individualism; and I hope I am not, therefore, a Liberal.

Whether Fascism has done better or worse for Italy than Bolshevism has done for Russia is a moot point. Under neither system has the ordinary worker the right to call his soul his own. But the point surely is, that while Bolshevism is a blundering and foredoomed attempt to enforce Socialism in a country nine-tenths peasant, Fascism is an only too successful attempt to crush Socialism and democracy, and make Italy "safe for" Capitalism. I am for neither Fascism nor Bolshevism; but if the world had to choose between the two, I should be a Bolshevik. I should, at least, not change my side in the class war.

Mussolini, whatever he has done or not done for Italy, is a worse menace to world peace than twenty Lenins. With his open contempt for the League of Nations, his strident demands for expansion, and his "mailed fist" methods at Corfu and Fiume, and in Albania, he is to-day what the Kaiser was in 1914—an enemy of the human race.

[9] Editors: Social Democratic Federation.

THE ELECTION

Originally published in *The New Statesman and Nation* 2, no. 37 (1931): 570

Sir,—May I briefly reply to Mr. Clifford Allen's questions in your current issue?

(1) There can be no parallel between the cases of Lenin and Mr. MacDonald.[10] Lenin was a revolutionary dictator. He never concealed for an instant that his object was to introduce Socialism at the earliest possible moment. He never made arrangements with his political opponents; and he never pretended that the New Economic Policy was anything but a temporary tactical manœuvre to be followed, as it has been, by a vigorous Socialist advance. Finally, he took care to carry his party with him.

Mr. MacDonald is a parliamentary politician who deliberately in 1924 and 1929, took office in circumstances which made it impossible for him to prosecute his party's essential policy of Socialism. We know now, from his own admission during the Scaham context, that he no longer believes it possible—if he ever did—to introduce Socialism in our time. Consistently with this, he has entered into arrangements with the opponents of Socialism to carry out a policy designed, not to prepare the way for a new Socialist advance, but to make capitalism solvent and stable. Finally, he entered into those arrangements in the teeth of his own party, and has now done his best to smash it.

(2) The methods by which this election has been fought by the renegade Labour leaders, and particular by Mr. Snowden, will, I hope and trust, never be forgotten or forgiven by any self-respecting Socialist. The questions of disarmament, finance, India, and so forth, to which Mr. Allen refers, will be dealt with by the now omnipotent Tory Party in their own fashion, and no effort of the Opposition will

[10] Editors: This is Prime Minister Ramsay MacDonald, who in 1931 betrayed the Labour Party and was eventually expelled for it when he formed the National Government and sided with the Conservatives in a bid to destroy the Labour Party.

have the smallest effect on their treatment while this Parliament lasts. The business of the Labour Party is to educate, agitate and organise in the country, and to stand in readiness for the inevitable *dies irae*.—Yours, etc., Archibald Robertson.

THE SLAVONIC JOSEPHUS

Originally published in *The Literary Guide* (May 1932): 90–91.

In 70 A.D., after a desperate rising of the Jewish people against Roman rule, the legions of Titus stormed Jerusalem, massacred or enslaved its inhabitants, burnt the Temple, and razed the city to the ground. The revolt, coinciding as it did with a period of weakness and civil war in the Empire, alarmed Rome sufficiently to make it worth her while to subsidize propaganda calculated to convince Eastern populations of the futility of further uprisings. A Jewish priest and turncoat, Joseph bar Matthia, commonly known as Josephus, was commissioned to do the job; and to this we owe his history of the Jewish War.

He tells us himself that he wrote it first in his native language, Aramaic, for Oriental consumption, and later produced a Greek version for the Hellenistic world.[11] As he was not a good Greek scholar, this last work was done for him by hacks. The Greek history went through more than one edition, and underwent considerable revision and re-writing. The earlier versions seem to have borne the title, *The Capture of Jerusalem*; the later, following Roman fashion, were entitled *The Jewish War*. One of these latter is embodied in our standard Greek text. It bears no traces of translation from a Semitic original, and is evidently a free paraphrase and not a translation in the true sense.

The Jewish War opens with an outline of Jewish history from 170 B.C. to the outbreak of the war with Rome. The standard text of the work is without a single reference to Christianity or its titular founder. This is used as an argument for the "myth" theory of Christian origins. We must remember, however, that no extant manuscript of Josephus is older than the eleventh century, and that,

[11] Editors: Present scholarship refutes this understanding. The Greek is in fact vague on this point, and no evidence of an Aramaic original has ever been produced. Most scholars doubt there was any Aramaic original today. Those who still uphold it are reliant entirely on Eisler, whom Robertson partly refutes here.

in Dr. Robert Eisler's words, "not a single… text has come down to us which has not passed through the hands of Christian scribes and Christian owners."[12] As Josephus, a Jew writing by favour of the Romans, would not in any case have penned a flattering estimate of Jesus or his followers, it is not surprising that his account of them, if he wrote one, should have disappeared from our standard text. The existing paragraph about Jesus in the *Antiquities*, a later work of Josephus, is admitted on all hands to be a Christian forgery. I referred in the *Rationalist Annual* for 1928 to the grounds for suspecting an authentic original which it replaced.

The famous Slavonic version of *The Jewish War* which Dr. Eisler has done so much to introduce to English readers, appears to be a thirteenth-century translation of a Greek text which differed in many places from our standard text. In Dr. Eisler's words, the Slavonic, except for certain minor glosses, "reproduces its original with such mechanical accuracy as to be almost unintelligible before it is put back into Greek through an equally mechanical retroversion."[13]

To all intents and purposes, then, we are dealing with a rival Greek text. Dr. Eisler further contends that this Greek text, unlike our standard text, was translated from a Semitic original. He argues that the Slavonic text in its transcription of proper names shows errors of a nature which cannot be explained by confusion of one *Greek* letter with another on the part of the Slavonic translator, but can easily be

[12] Editors: We do now have some older manuscript fragments and older manuscripts *in translation* to other languages. These were all done by Christians.

[13] Editors: While this is somewhat true in that the Old Russian preserves many Greek word structures, and leaves entire phrases untranslated, it is largely known Old Russian which Eisler was himself not very familiar with. Contemporary studies have largely refuted this idea and even shown several examples of Eisler's "retroversion" are falsehoods. Despite this, enough Greek exists that we actually reconstructed the family Russian text belonged to in Greek, VRC, which was previously well-known already and which was also *more unreliable* and *post-Christian* in origin. None of this was yet known when Robertson was writing, however. He must be forgiven his ignorance and accepting some of Eisler's account without question.

explained by supposed the Greek translator confused one *Semitic* letter with another. As there would be no point in translating a later Semitic version of Josephus back into Greek when a good Greek text already existed, Dr. Eisler contends that the Greek text underlying the Slavonic represents one of the early "hack" translations made by Josephus's direction from his original Aramaic work. It is relevant to this that the Slavonic text bears the title, *The Capture of Jerusalem*, not *The Jewish War*, which latter, as we have seen, Josephus adopted only after he had begun to write specifically for Greek and Roman readers.

The differences between the standard Greek text and that preserved in the Slavonic version by no means relate solely to Christian origins. Dr. Eisler cites many passages, occurring in the Slavonic but not in the standard text, which refer to Roman history or to Jewish history under the Herod dynasty, and which no Christian could have had any motive for concocting, unless we are to suppose that he forged simply for fun! The main interest, however, of the Slavonic version lies in a comparatively few passages which relate to the beginnings of Christianity, and to which Dr. Eisler devotes the major portion of his book, *The Messiah Jesus and John the Baptist*.

I must confine myself here to dealing with that section of the Slavonic text which relates to Jesus. This passage occurs immediately after that dealing with the *fracas* caused by Pilate's introduction of Roman standards into Jerusalem, and in its present shape carries glaring marks of Christian forgery. Dr. Eisler contends, however, that genuinely Josephan raw material is discernible beneath the finished article. For example, the opening sentences are obviously composite. Phrase contradicts phrase:—

> At that time there appeared a certain man, if it is meet to call him a man. His nature and form were human, but the appearance of him more than that of a human being: yet his works were divine. He wrought miracles wonderful and strong. Wherefore it is impossible for me to call him a human

being. But, on the other hand, if I look at his ordinary nature, I will not call him an angel.

This plainly displays Christian workmanship. But would a Christian, inventing freely with nothing before him to work on, have penned this halting, hedging, much-qualified portrait? Does not the wording suggest that there was something already there which he had to gloss over.

This impression is considerably strengthened when a little later we read that there gathered to the wonder-worker on the Mount of Olives "helpers 150, but of the mob a multitude," who instigated him to "enter the city and cut down the Roman troops and Pilate and rule over us"—a suggestion which according to one MS. "he did not disdain," though according to most "he did not heed it." The narrative goes on to say that the priests laid information before Pilate, who "sent and had many of the multitude slain" and the wonder-worker arrested. The end of the section, which relates his trial and crucifixion, is a mass of interpolations on the usual Christian lines.

Dr. Eisler claims that the authentic text of Josephus can be restored by stripping it of all phrases which he could not possibly have written. In this way we are left with an account of a wonder-worker of a type common in the East, whose following look to him as the promised deliverer from Roman rule, and who, after an armed conflict with the authorities (the account of which has been severely truncated by Christian copyists), is captured and crucified out of hand. Dr. Eisler's restoration can be criticized in detail, and is in the nature of the case conjectural. But when allowance is made for this we are still faced with the question whether a text which explicitly associates the central figure of Christianity with a seditious outbreak can be *entirely* the work of a Christian hand.

A temptingly simple solution is to say that, while touches favourable to Christianity are due to Christian invention, those unfavourable to it (e.g. the sedition and the massacre) are the work of medieval Jews. The picture of Christian and Jewish interpolators engaged in a sort of game of "beggar my neighbour" has its humorous

side! But here the question arises whether any medieval Jew would have represented his own people (albeit only "the mob") as having, even for a moment, hailed the hated Nazarene as their king and courted death in his cause? The supposition of a Jewish forgery seems fraught with difficulty.

Lastly, it may be asked why this passage, if it once formed part of Josephus's *Jewish War*, has disappeared from our standard text. Dr. Eisler suppose that the work as Josephus left it, after certain Christian interpolations and deletions, was allowed currency by the Byzantine authorities until the eleventh century. It was then found that even the interpolated text was open to objection, as it provided support for the all-too-human view of Jesus favoured by Judaizing heretics of the period. The authorities thenceforward took the drastic step of deleting *all* references to Jesus in such MSS. of the *War* as they could lay hands on, though a few unexpurgated MSS. survived long enough to be used by the Slavonic translator in the thirteenth century. References in some orthodox writers to a "spurious Josephus" used by heretics lend a certain possibility to this hypothesis.

Archibald Robertson ("Robert Arch")

SEEING A RELIGION DIE

Originally published in *The Literary Guide*, no. 436 (October 1932): 186–87

I have recently spent twelve days in the Soviet Union, and have been asked by the editor of the *Guide* to give my impressions of the religious and anti-religious outlook in that country. While anxious to oblige, I am afraid my qualifications for writing on the topic are very small. So brief a visit does not confer much more knowledge than can be acquired by any diligent and critical student of the literature of the subject. I do not profess, therefore, to do more than record a few facts which are either public property or which came under my notice, and which can be verified by anyone with the will and the means to go and see for himself.

As every one knows, the Orthodox Church has been disestablished and disendowed by the Bolsheviks, and Marxist Materialism has become the official creed of European and Asiatic Russia. This does not mean that the exercise of religion is forbidden. It does mean, however, that the priest is absolutely dependent on the voluntary support of the faithful; and as the whole weight of Government propaganda, including the entire educational machine, is thrown into the scales on behalf of Atheism, such support tends to become "small by degrees and beautifully less." One of my fellow tourists thought he saw priests begging for bread in the market of Leningrad. He was not positive of this, but it appears very probable. A great number of churches have been closed for want of worshippers.

On August 20 I was present with some others of our party at a service in a small church in Ivanovo Voznesensk, a leading centre of the Soviet textile industry. We counted about seventy people in the congregation, all of whom, with two or three exceptions, were grey-haired men and women. That was the only service I witnessed; but members of our party who visited churches in Leningrad and Moscow brought back similar reports. So far as the big towns are concerned,

the Gospel of Christ in Soviet Russia is being preached to a dying generation.

How far this is the case in the agricultural districts, which contain by far the greater part of the Russian population, is a question on which I have no first-hand evidence. Yaroslavsky, the President of the League of Militant Atheists, recently admitted to a body of American professors that seventy per cent of the Red Army, in replying to a questionnaire, had declared their belief in God. It must be remembered, however, that the Russian Revolution is only fifteen years old. The causes which have brought about the senescence of religion in the towns are also at work in the country, and can hardly fail, as time goes on, to produce identical results.

I saw something of the methods of propaganda which are being employed against religion. They are not merely negative and "anti-God," but also positive and scientific. What was once St. Isaac's cathedral in Leningrad is now an anti-religious museum. There I saw an exhibition of bogus "relics" once cherished by the Orthodox Church—a bottle containing "tears of the Virgin Mary," and so forth. There are posters and placards setting forth such items as the amount the cathedral cost to build and the emoluments of ecclesiastical dignitaries under the old regime, in contrast to the condition of the people at the time. There is a life-size statue of Giordano Bruno at the stake, complete with imitation flames. But what pleased me most, as a Rationalist, was to see a huge Foucault pendulum suspended from the dome of the cathedral, inculcating by its daily angular motion the lesson of the earth's rotation, and intended to teach the populace the rudiments of scientific thought. In a school we visited in Leningrad were hung a large portrait of Darwin and a number of drawings and diagrams illustrating the theory of evolution. The intention is clearly, by driving home the truths of physical and biological science, to make it impossible for the juvenile or the adult mind to harbour any kind of belief in the Christian mythology.

It would be disingenuous to proceed without referring to those aspects of Bolshevik ideology with which readers of this article are least likely to agree. Most active adherents of the Freethought

Movement in Britain—at all events, of the older generation—regard the attack on supernaturalism as a work to be carried on for its own sake, and independently of any social, political, or economic doctrine. Members of all political parties are welcomed in the Rationalist ranks. The Bolshevik has absolutely no use for such a movement as this. To him, as a Marxist, religious and philosophical systems, and indeed the whole world of ideas, are determined by the economic processes which lie at the root of human society. As I understand him, he does not deny that the intellectual superstructure reacts on the economic substructure and modifies it from time to time. But he does emphatically deny that you can deal with one without the other. He is a practical Monist. The attack on Christianity, therefore, is for the Bolshevik part and parcel of the attack on capitalism. His attitude is summed up in the slogans so often posted in public spaces—"Religion is the opium of the people" and "The struggle against religion is a struggle for Socialism."

That being so, it is not to be expected that the Bolsheviks should set any store by the notions of State neutrality—equal rights for all religions, a fair field and no favour—which are traditional with the average Rationalist here. The essence of the Soviet system being the dictatorship of the proletariat, it would be from the Bolshevik point of view sheer insanity, if not treason, to accord equal rights of propaganda to doctrines which he regards as designed to "dope" the proletariat in the interests of the former ruling classes. Hence the prohibition of the teaching of religion to persons under the age of eighteen—a measure which is objectionable in the extreme to those who accept the assumptions of Western liberalism, but entirely conformable to the general Bolshevik position, and (in my humble judgment) has much to be said for it in the interests of the child himself.

It is an interesting question how far Bolshevism, which to all appearances is destined to supplant Christianity and other historic faiths over at least one-sixth of the habitable globe, has in itself the makings of a religious cult. Certain manifestations make the question at any rate worth discussing. There is the enormous queue which

every day forms in the Red Square, Moscow, before the mausoleum of Lenin, waiting to file silently through the subterranean chamber where the embalmed body of the dead leader lies in state.

This is a really impressive sight; I know one fellow-tourist of mine who, stout British Imperialist and individualist though he is, was deeply moved by it. Then there are the photographs of Lenin which hung in nearly every dwelling we entered, often side by side with ikons, indicating perhaps a Bolshevik husband married to an Orthodox wife, or perhaps a judicious syncretism. And there is one very interesting thing which I saw. In a children's crèche at Ivanovo Voznesensk there is a life-size figure of the infant Lenin seated on a volume of Karl Marx!

Is this a new religion? A young Freethinker in our party, otherwise not ill disposed to the Bolsheviks, was excessively perturbed about it. "Soon," he said, "they will bring in the Virgin Birth and the rest of the bag of tricks." I endeavoured to reassure him by point out that, as long as the body of Lenin was on public view, no one at any rate could say that he had risen from the dead!

I wish to avoid anything in the nature of dogmatism or rash generalization. But it certainly seems to me that in the vast territories which constitute the Soviet Union there is taking place to-day the most extraordinary religious—or, if you will, anti-religious—revolution that the world has witnessed since the days of Constantine and Theodosius.

Archibald Robertson
("Robert Arch").

THE MOSCOW TRIAL

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Sir,—Mrs. L'Estrange Malone considers it "truly awful" that people should be shot in Russia on charges of sabotage. The view one takes of the matter really turns on the question whether people *in fact* destroy machines, sow weeds, fire tractor-stations and disorganise work with counter-revolutionary intent. If we take the view propagated in the English press, viz., that such sabotage is a mere myth invented by the Soviets to cloak the "failure" of the Five Year Plan, we shall naturally regard the executions as not only awful, but atrocious.

But is this the only possible view? Mr. W. A. Rukeyser in his book, *Working for the Soviets*, says that in the opinion of most American specialists in Russia there is deliberate and widespread sabotage and counter-revolutionary activity. He himself expresses the view that the G.P.U. never strikes without reason. And Mr. Rukeyser is not a Communist or even a Socialist—quite the contrary.

As to the lapse of "a few hours" or "minutes" between trial and execution, I leave it to your readers to judge which is the more "awful"—this, or the English practice of leaving the felon in the condemned cell for three or more weeks and carefully preventing him from taking his own life, in order that he may die at a rope's end "by due form of law."

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THE SECULARIZATION OF THE STATE AND THE FREEDOM OF THE INDIVIDUAL

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"The Christian Country"

We are often told that this is a Christian country. In a sense this statement is true; in other senses it is not. It is certainly not true that our public institutions or om: private behaviour are founded upon the New Testament. They are not, for the simple reason that they could not be. We do not turn our other cheek to the smiter; nor do we love our enemies. On the contrary, we spend many millions of pounds annually on the fighting services in order that, when the time comes, we may be able to mangle, maim, drown, bum, and suffocate our enemies with the greatest possible efficiency. So far from resisting not evil and judging not that we be not judged, we employ judges, law officers, barristers, police, prison governors, warders, and hangmen with the express purpose of making things unpleasant for evildoers and, in the last resort, putting them to death. Witnesses in our courts of law are, as a general rule, not allowed to let their yea be yea and their nay nay, but are expected, in fiat defiance of the Sermon on the Mount, to swear by Almighty God to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. We lay up for ourselves treasure on earth to the very best of our ability. This process is known in polite circles as the accumulation of private capital, and is the foundation of our economic system. Unless we are eccentric to the verge of insanity, we do not generally give to him that asks, and very frequently turn away from him that would borrow from us. Most of us, especially at this time of "economic blizzard," are anxious for the morrow, and would consider it the height of imprudence to let the morrow take care of itself.

This is certainly not, therefore, a Christian country in the sense that its citizens are practising Christians. It is very doubtful whether a majority of them are even in any adequate sense believing Christians. Choose any dozen of your acquaintances at random, repeat the Nicene Creed to them, and ask whether they believe the propositions contained in it. They may think you a little mad; they may consider your question in very bad taste. But it is a safe bet that not half, and it is probable that not a quarter of your random dozen will reply, as their ancestors in the Middle Ages would have replied, with a simple, matter-of-fact affirmative.

The Church By Law Established

There is only one sense in which it is true that ours is a Christian country. A Christian Church, which the largest Christian body in the world, the Roman Catholic, judges to be heretical and schismatic, is established by law as the Church of England. Another Church, equally schismatic and even more heretical in the judgment of most Christians, is established by law as the Church of Scotland. The King is by Act of Parliament Defender of the Faith and Supreme Governor of the Church of England. He is crowned according to her ritual, swears at his coronation to maintain her doctrine and worship, and appoints her archbishops, bishops, deans, and certain other dignitaries on the advice of the Prime Minister of the day. The relations of the King to the Church of Scotland are less direct, and need not detain us.

By virtue of legal establishment the Church of England enjo3rs possession of the numerous cathedrals and churches erected for Catholic worship prior to the Reformation, as well as those built for her own worship since, and of the extensive properties attached to them. Certain of these properties take the form of payments known as tithes, dating from the Middle Ages, and enforceable at law against holders of agricultural land, whether members of the Church of England or not. Archbishops and bishops, up to a certain number, sit as “Lords Spiritual” in the House of Peers; and clergy of the Established Church generally enjoy by virtue of their position a status

and prestige higher than that accorded to Nonconformist ministers, and, of course, different in kind from any that attaches to plain citizens, who are merely useful in this world. No naval or military force is complete without its complement of chaplains appointed and paid by the State to see that officers and men, in the intervals of bombarding, bayoneting, and gassing our enemies, do not forget the worship due to Almighty God. No war can be fought to a successful conclusion without special prayers for victory sanctioned by the archbishops and bishops of the Church of England. And, when the war is over, peace is not peace unless it is first seasoned with special services, sanctioned by the same authorities, of thanksgiving to Almighty God for having blessed our guns, bayonets, torpedoes, aeroplanes, and poison gas with victory over the equivalent devices of the foe.

It is obvious that the kind of Christianity established in this country is very different from any which can be deduced from the New Testament. To be surprised at this, however, is to write oneself down a simpleton. Every instructed person knows that the question what is and what is not Christianity is to be determined, not by candid study of the Scriptures (a dangerous proceeding which leads usually to contradictory and always to inconvenient conclusions) but by "the mind of the Church." The mind of the Church of England is nowhere better expressed than in her Thirty-Nine Articles of Religion. Vulgarly literal applications of the New Testament are there set aside, and we are plainly told that the goods of Christian men are not common, that a Christian government may punish its subjects with death for heinous and grievous offences, that it is lawful for them at the command of the magistrate to bear weapons and serve in the wars, and that to put it frankly, whatever Christ and His apostles may have said or done, "they didn't know everything down in Judee."

The Anthropocentric Myth

This variation of Christianity has been established among us since the sixteenth century. Since then the mental background of the human

race has been revolutionized. That background three or four hundred years ago was crudely anthropocentric. Nearly everyone believed that the earth was the centre of the universe, and that it and all that it contained had been created a few thousand years ago on purpose to be the abode of man. On such a hypothesis it was natural to suppose that the Creator of the world took a peculiar interest in the behaviour of mankind, that He had on sundry historical occasions revealed His will to them, and that like a Sultan or Emperor magnified to colossal proportions. He would reward the obedient with everlasting happiness and punish the disobedient with everlasting torment. The former was to be secured and the latter averted by worshipping the Deity with proper solemnity in accordance with His supposed revelation, observing those taboos (many of them socially valuable, others the reverse) which the Chinch had inherited from the ancient Jewish religion, and bewailing any breach of such taboos with becoming abjectness and humility. The whole ritual of public worship was, and still is, directed to secure the favour and avert the wrath of the Creator of the universe thus anthropomorphically imagined.

The Myth Discredited

During the seventeenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth centuries the movement of thought, in the main, has been steadily away from these crude conceptions. The first blow was struck by the astronomers when they demonstrated that the earth was not the centre of the universe, but an insignificant planet of an insignificant star.[14] The second was struck by the geologists and biologists when they demonstrated that life on earth had had a history of hundreds of millions of years before man appeared, and that even man had lived on earth for hundreds of thousands of years before the supposed date of the creation of Adam. The third was struck by the literary and historical critics when they demonstrated that the writings purporting to contain the Divine revelation were a collection of legends,

[14] It was not for nothing that the Pope and Cardinals took fright at Galileo. They divined correctly, better in fact than he did, where the new discoveries would lead.

prophecies, and exhortations of uncertain date, more uncertain authorship, corrupted and interpolated texts, and mutually contradictory tendencies.

The result is that to-day it is exceedingly doubtful, as already suggested, whether one-quarter of the British people are in a strict sense Christian believers. Religious apologists in these days are so anxious to clutch at any real or supposed "scientific support," that Sir James Jeans, the astronomer, has become in popular estimation a pillar of the faith. Now the God of Sir James Jeans is a "pure mathematician" outside time and space, who by a mere act of thought brings the universe and its whole history into being, as an artist working at his easel creates a picture. With the process of reasoning by which Sir James reaches this result I am not here concerned. It is obvious that on such a theory mankind and its affairs would be the merest puppet-show, and that anything in the nature of a moral relation between the Creator and His creatures would be inconceivable. How far prayer and thanksgiving (how far, for example, prayers for rain, for the Royal Family, for the High Court of Parliament, and for victory in war) can consistently be addressed to the God of Sir James Jeans I leave the intelligent reader to judge for himself.

Why the Church Survives

A further result of this development, if the course of human affairs were logical, would have been the official disavowal of the Christian mythology and the Christian ethics attached to it, and the recognition of the increase of happiness and diminution of misery on earth as the supreme touchstone of public policy. Unfortunately, this is not the case. Whenever religion is organized, its organization crystallizes into a vested interest, and its social and political defences are certain to remain intact long after its intellectual defences have crumbled. It must be remembered, moreover, that the Church is not an isolated interest bamboozling and defying a world which needs only sufficient enlightenment to unite against and dethrone her. This is the mistake

made by the older school of Rationalists. In their view there are only two sides in the struggle, reason and superstition; and the task of the reformer is simply, by continual appeals to reason, to go on winning supporters for "the best of causes" until all the world is reasonable. The picture is false because it leaves entirely out of account the economic, social, and political factors which divide men against one another. Wherever there exists on the one hand an owning and governing class and on the other hand a class of the exploited, religion is far too useful as an auxiliary policeman for the owning class to disdain its aid, whatever may be the measure of their private belief or disbelief. On the intellectual plane Christianity has never been more thoroughly riddled than by Voltaire and the Encyclopaedists in the eighteenth century. Yet from a political and social point of view the Christian religion was probably no less strongly entrenched in Europe (including Britain) in 1878 than in 1778, the year of Voltaire's death; and except in Bolshevik Russia, its entrenchments have hardly been weakened at all in the subsequent half-century. The ruling classes, sceptical to the core beneath their outward conformity in the age of Voltaire, have discovered since then that infidelity, if allowed to infect the populace, issues in revolution. The Church, they have found, is necessary as an auxiliary policeman, and as such must enjoy the privileges of a policeman. She must be armed with authority, and her prestige defended by the State against any ribald attack, however inconsistent such special protection may be with the principles of enlightenment and individual liberty which are said to lie at the basis of modem civilization.

Civil and religious liberty are popularly believed to have been secured to all British subjects by the struggles of the seventeenth, eighteenth, and early nineteenth centuries. Not the least of our boasted civil liberties is supposed to be "freedom of the Press." Milton's *Areopagitica*, Wilkes and the *North Briton* Richard Carlile and his repeated imprisonments, Holyoake and the fight against "taxes on knowledge"—such are the memories which that resounding phrase conjures up in the min d of a modem reformer. And, indeed, in times past, when great masses of the rising middle class were

united in a co mm on cause by the battle against royal and ecclesiastical domination, and when the printing and circulation of a bellicose broadsheet or pamphlet was an enterprise well within the means of the average literate citizen, liberty of the Press was a weapon on the side of reform which it was well worth a struggle to secure. To-day, however, the situation is very different. As in other fields of capitalist enterprise, so in the newspaper world, small independent concerns have given place to "big business"; competition has reached its natural term in monopoly. It now needs a capital of millions to print and distribute a successful daily paper. The result is a "tied press" concentrated in the hands of a few wealthy syndicates, who compete with one another for circulation (in so far as they *do* compete and are not mutually interlocked) by pandering to the lowest common intellectual denominator of the semi-literate mob of wage-slaves manufactured by our economic and educational system. Sporting and betting news, sex offences and murders, sentimental serials and money competitions, together make up the normal pabulum of the mass of newspaper readers.

In these circumstances, what chance is there of any unpopular cause, or any issue the comprehension of which demands at least some intellectual effort, being accorded prominence in our great "organs of public opinion"? There is just one chance. The cause in question may coincide so closely with the financial or other interests of the owner that he will mobilize his newspapers in its support despite its unpopularity. Thus a newspaper owner, being a very rich man, naturally wishes his supertax to be lessened. The cause of "economy," which means scaling down the incomes of poor people in order to reduce the taxation of the rich, will, therefore, have his enthusiastic patronage. His newspapers will not, of course, put the issue so baldly as this. They will inveigh in leaded type against "wastrels" and "squander-maniacs," pretend that the whole proceeds of supertax go into the pockets of greedy officials, and tell their poorer readers that they will be better off after the "economies" than before. In a case such as this a thing unpopular with a large section of the public may, with suitable camouflage, be "put across" by a great

daily. But such cases are exceptional. Where the interests of the owner are not engaged on the side of change, and still more where they are definitely adverse to it, no cause need look for fair play. Letters on behalf of Socialism and Internationalism will be suppressed; Communist or anti-war meetings, however largely attended, will not be reported; and "news" generally will be selected and edited in such a way as to present a consistently one-sided picture of the way the world is going. In short, as Lenin put it, liberty of the Press under Capitalism means the liberty of men who are rich enough to own newspapers to lie to those who are only rich enough to buy them.[15] Under Capitalism as it now is, it is impossible to regard so-called freedom of the Press as the unmixed social good which it admittedly was under other and simpler economic circumstances.

The Blasphemy Laws

By an ironical coincidence the statute law of blasphemy in its present shape, except for one particular, dates from the reign of that hero of Whig historians and saviour par excellence of our civil and religious liberties, William of Orange. The Blasphemy Act of 1697–1698 enacts that, if any person, educated in or having made profession of the Christian religion, shall by writing, preaching, teaching, or advised speaking deny any one of the Persons of the Holy Trinity to be God, or shall assert or maintain that there are more gods than one, or shall deny the Christian religion to be true or the Holy Scriptures to be of Divine authority, he shall upon the first offence be rendered incapable of holding any office or place of trust, and for the second incapable of bringing any action, of being guardian or executor, or of taking a legacy or deed of gift, and shall suffer three years'

[15] Editors: Vladimir Lenin, "Speech at the First All-Russia Congress of Workers in Education and Socialist Culture" (31 July 1919) in *Collected Works* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1972): 29.532–39 where he writes "Freedom of the press in capitalist society means freedom to trade in publications and in their influence on the masses. Freedom of the press means that the press, a powerful medium for influencing the masses, is maintained at the expense of the capitalists."

imprisonment without bail. An Act of 1812–1813 relieves Unitarians from these penalties. Otherwise the statute law on the subject remains unaltered.

Prosecutions for blasphemy are in practice instituted not under this statute, but under the common law of England, which treats all denials of God or His Providence, all contumacious reproaches of Jesus Christ, and all profane scoffing at Holy Scripture as punishable by fine, imprisonment, and corporal punishment. In the course of the last century the tendency has been to use these powers somewhat circumspectly. As lately as 1867 a court of law affirmed that Christianity was part and parcel of the law of England, and that in attacks upon Christianity the law itself was attacked. More recently, it has been ruled that the offence of blasphemy is committed only when such an attack takes an insulting form. In actual fact, therefore, proceedings are levelled only against those members of the community to whom our social system has allowed only an elementary education and a limited vocabulary, and who are unable to express themselves otherwise than crudely. Blasphemy, in short, like sleeping out, has become a poor man's offence.

From time to time attempts have been made to repeal the Blasphemy Laws. The latest of these attempts was in 1930, when a Bill introduced by Mr. Ernest Thurtle passed its second reading in the House of Commons. It is significant that this Bill was opposed by the whole strength of the Conservative Party in the House. To that opposition, reinforced by the defection of certain weak-kneed Liberal and Labour members, and by the equivocal attitude of the then Labour Government, we owe the destruction of this Bill in Committee and the perpetuation of this antiquated blot on our legal system.

Why Blasphemy is Still a Crime

Those accustomed to the frank, questioning atmosphere of advanced movements may think it unaccountable and even incredible that the entire force of one political party, assisted by reputable members of

the other two, should have been successfully mobilized to maintain on the statute book enactments framed for the protection of one particular religion. Those familiar with the mentality of the ordinary politician may even wonder how many Members of Parliament who voted against the repeal of the Blasphemy Laws are themselves sincere believers in the truth of Christianity and the Divine authority of Holy Scripture, impugners of which they are so anxious to punish. The whole thing becomes credible and intelligible only when we remember that, as Belfort Bax put it fifty years ago, "the bourgeois is acute enough to connect Atheism and Communism." Christianity may or may not be part and parcel of the law of England; but profession of Christianity is without doubt part and parcel of the essential cement of the capitalist system. As long as that system endures, therefore, our public men will for the most part continue to do lip-service to a religion in which only a minority of them sincerely believe, and to resist to the utmost all attempts to put Christianity on the same legal level as other forms of opinion.

Broadcasting

The British Broadcasting Corporation, which by Act of Parliament is the sole purveyor of radio entertainment in this country, naturally holds itself at the absolute disposal of the established order and the established religion. The privilege of transmitting religious services over the ether is accorded with admirable impartiality to the various Churches, or at least to all of them who possess sufficient wealth and standing to make themselves a nuisance; and a brand of theology known as "B.B.C. religion"—a sort of highest common factor of all the Christian denominations—has been specially invented for broadcasting on those occasions when no particular sect is in possession of the microphone. This impartiality ceases, however, when it is a question of transmitting views antithetic to supernaturalism. Some years ago Mr. Wells, Professor J. B. S. Haldane, and certain others were allowed to broadcast addresses of a Freethinking tendency; but such strong objection was taken by the

Churches that facilities of this nature are no longer given.[16] Similarly in the political field, when controversy or debate is permitted at all, the use of the microphone is strictly confined to those parties. Conservative, Liberal, and Labour, which, in practice at all events, agree in working within the limits of the Capitalist Parliamentary system. The exclusion of the Communist from broadcast controversy is as complete as that of the Atheist.

The Sunday Taboo

From the privileged position occupied by the Christian religion in the present social order, the natural result follows that physical, recreational, and cultural enjoyments meats are at any time liable to encounter the veto of Christianity or of some taboo which a historical accident has identified with Christianity. For obscure reasons, probably of astrological origin, the Jewish religion from its inception prohibited the performance of any kind of work on the *seventh* day of the week. Christians, on the other hand, have always celebrated "the Lord's day" on the *first* day of the week. The two observances have clearly nothing to do with one another, and in Catholic countries no one would dream of confusing the Christian Sunday with the Jewish Sabbath.[17] Among Protestants, however, and particularly those of English speech, the widespread but superficial study of the Bible which set in with the Reformation led to the taboos attaching to the Sabbath being uncritically transferred *holus bolus* to Sunday. No manner of work, therefore, must be done on Sunday; and as the provision of any form of entertainment is apt to involve work, no entertainment either must be enjoyed on Sunday so far as Puritan kill-joys (by no means confined to the Free Churches) can possibly prevent it.

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[16] While this book was in press, Professor J. S. Huxley was allowed to broadcast a talk on Rationalism. This exception—the first for years—is one of those which prove the rule.

[17] In Latin countries the term "sabbath" (*sabbato*, *sabado*, *samedi*) is uniformly applied to Saturday, not Sunday.

The question of Sunday observance should not be confused, as its advocates of set design confuse it, with the quite different issue of the worker's claim to a periodical day of rest. It would be the simplest thing in the world to arrange that all persons obliged to work on Sunday should enjoy an alternative day of rest in the week. In fact there is no reason, apart from superstition, why the day of rest should be observed every seventh day rather than, as in Russia, every fifth or sixth day. The attempt of the Sabbatarian to don the disguise of a proletarian champion is therefore simply hypocritical. Provided that the right of the worker to a day of rest not less than once in seven days is enforced, there is no necessity for any legislative or municipal recognition of Sunday as such.

Dramatic and Film Censorship

Owing to the fact that the interests of the entertainment industry favour the relaxation of Sunday restrictions and that the forces of religion themselves are divided on this issue, the prospects of progress in this direction are brighter than in others. In most departments, however, the powers that be stand foursquare in defence of the religious and ethical standards of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. It goes without saying that any dramatic production or film which directly attacks established religion or morals is liable to censorship. Not only so, but any work may confidently be expected to come under the ban if, without any direct challenge, it treats these subjects with sufficient candour to evoke "dangerous thoughts" in the minds of a possible audience. The exploits of the British censorship of plays dining the last forty years are notorious. Ibsen's *Ghosts* was banned because it introduced the subject of venereal disease and challenged the accepted sexual code; Shaw's *Mrs. Warren's Profession*, because it discussed the problem of prostitution; Maeterlinck's *Monna Vanna* because in one scene the heroine was supposed to have nothing on beneath her cloak! The dramatic censorship, of course, is not always based on religious or moral grounds. A further convention prohibits the representation on the

stage of any sovereign of the reigning royal house. Mr. Laurence Housman's one-act dramas dealing with the life of Queen Victoria, though witty, sympathetic, and, one would suppose, inoffensive to anyone with a sense of humour or proportion, are nevertheless unplayable. This class of ban is in reality semi-religious. A British sovereign, according to the fiction maintained for popular consumption by our politicians and Press, is a quasi-divine being whose every word and deed is the embodiment of quintessential majesty, wisdom, and altruism; and this myth must not be shattered by the exhibition of the supposed idol, even if a generation dead, as a fallible man or woman of like passions with ourselves. This quasi-apotheosis of the sovereign, like other established superstitions, is part of the defensive mechanism of Capitalist society. It serves to veil, as with a picturesque medieval tapestry, the ugly, naked truth that society is divided into exploiters and exploited, and to conjure up when necessary the traditional emotionalism of "King and Country" which sends young men to agony and death in the wars which are the necessary fruit of capitalist concession-hunting.[18]

Literary Censorship

Another direct result of the privileged status accorded to the Christian religion is the benighted attitude of the law, and of those who interpret and apply it, to the whole subject of sex. The subject is dealt with by another contributor to this volume, and need not therefore be treated here except to stress two points. First, the official acceptance of the irrational sex-code which Christianity adopted from Judaism leads to vexatious and tyrannical interferences with literary freedom which have nothing to do with "decency," and admit of no utilitarian defence

[18] It is noteworthy that while any film realistically exposing war for what it is would be subject to drastic censorship, films glorifying war enjoy the special protection of the authorities. Two undergraduates were in September 1933 sentenced at Swindon to a month's imprisonment for interrupting the film *Our Fighting Navy*. They were subsequently bound over and released. Had the film not been of a "patriotic" nature, they would have got off with a mild fine.

whatever. Miss Radclyffe Hall's *The Well of Loneliness* was not an indecent book. It was never alleged that it contained a single gross expression or a single "purple passage." Had it been let alone its appeal would certainly have been very small. But it dealt with the problem of homosexuality, and contained an implicit criticism of the Hebraic-Christian moral code on the subject. That eminent moralist, Mr. James Douglas, accordingly clamoured for its suppression in the public Press. Police proceedings were instituted. Miss Hall branded as an indecent writer, her book destroyed, and the array of eminent authors who were ready to testify to the high tone of her work insultingly rebuffed by the magistrate, with no other object than to vindicate the pre-scientific views of the Pentateuch and the Pauline Epistles on sexual abnormality.[19]

Dress Restrictions

Secondly, this superstitious attitude to sex leads by a natural transition to a corresponding fanaticism on the subject of dress or its absence. Mention has already been made of the ridiculous figure cut by the dramatic censorship in the case of *Monna Vanna*. Nowadays irrationality on this topic manifests itself most commonly in one of two quarters. The clergy of the Ro man Catholic Church from the Pope downward, being vowed to celibacy, naturally suffer from a morbid interest in such matters, and their pronouncements on the subject of female dress invariably make comic reading. Apart from the Catholic hierarchy, fulminations on the subject generally emanate from the city fathers of some chapel-ridden seaside resort. As their jurisdiction is only local, their outbursts need not be taken tragically. When, however, a high judicial authority like the Recorder of London betrays similar want of balance the matter becomes serious. To inveigh in open court against nudist "cults" and "societies" and to

[19] Editors: This indicates Robertson's overall non-negative attitude toward homosexuality, something which was rare among Communists who had tended to follow the USSR line that being gay was a capitalist/bourgeois conspiracy and ideology and therefore had to be repressed.

enjoin the police to "keep an eye on them," as Sir Ernest Wild did in a recent case, illustrates the wide opening for petty persecution and tyranny that will continue to exist as long as laws are made and administered by minds befogged with prejudice.

The Conquest of Freedom

In a society resolved to base its institutions on the knowledge of the twentieth century and not on the ignorance of the sixteenth, the explicit and sole object of all State action would be the maximization of happiness and the minimization of misery on earth, and the only barriers to individual freedom would be those necessary to secure and advance this object. This is not to be understood as a declaration in favour of Individualism. Restrictions on individual behaviour, especially in the economic sphere, are likely to be considerable in any State as yet within the range of practical possibilities. But while there is good utilitarian justification for such restrictions as are necessary to co-ordinate individual effort for the achievement of common satisfactions, there can be none for those imposed solely in the interests of a disputable and increasingly discredited body of moral and metaphysical dogma. The disestablishment and disendowment of all Churches and the secularization of all public life, especially public education, would mark the formal disavowal by the State of that body of dogma, and render possible a wholesale recasting of our legal system on a utilitarian basis, every step in which is at present blocked by the organized and united forces of an artificially entrenched superstition. It is a matter of dispute whether such a programme can be carried through within the framework of the present economic order, or whether, as Marxists believe, the official repudiation of Christianity and its characteristic taboos presupposes the repudiation of the capitalist system of which Christianity is now but the tool. I incline to the latter view. But even on this view it is necessary that the war against irrational taboos should be waged without ceasing, if only to demonstrate the variety of ways in which om: present social order hampers and hinders the march of humanity towards a freer and fuller

life. The Federation of Progressive Societies and Individuals exists for the purpose of convincing those reformers who are at present waging an uphill battle for this, that, or the other particular freedom, that their different causes are in reality one cause, and that in a united front based on a common ideology lies the surest guarantee of victory.

THE ISSUE OF FREEDOM

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Sir,—Surely the first step to clarity of thought on this question is to recognise that "freedom" is a relative term. We are free to do this, or not free to do that, as the case may be. The letters of your "liberal" correspondents all seem to proceed on the assumption that "freedom" in the abstract is a worthy—indeed the only worthy—object of political devotion. On closer examination, this abstract "freedom" turns out to be an alias for one particular freedom (viz., liberty to express and propagate opinions) beside which other common or garden freedoms valued by the man in the street are, it seems, of little importance. A very natural doctrine for intellectuals, whose stock in trade is opinion and nothing else; but a fallacy all the same. The freedoms most important to the plain man and woman comprise, first, the freedom to enjoy a sufficiency of good food and drink, secondly, a sufficiency of house-room; thirdly, a sufficiency of clothes, boots and other elementary comforts of life—freedoms which owing to economic conditions are denied to the majority of people. Fourthly, they want freedom to live undisturbed by that form of mass-murder which we call war. Fifthly, freedom to acquire enough knowledge of the world about them to make them fit for citizenship in a civilised society—a freedom conspicuously denied to them by our class system of education.

Marxists contend that in the absence of these indispensable conditions of a tolerable society, the "freedom of expression" supposed to be guaranteed in bourgeois society is of altogether secondary importance. At its best, it is a useful tool in the hands of competent agitators against the society which denies those other and more vital freedoms. At its worst, it amounts to the liberty of the press-lord and the careerist politician to "dope" the uneducated with lies. The Marxist is prepared to defend this freedom so long as it is useful, and no longer: in short, he is a realist.

HITLER'S DEMOCRACY

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Sir,—In his letter in your issue of December 8th, Mr. Douglas Jerrold incidentally refers to "Herr Hitler's advent to power on a free vote." It is notorious that Hitler did not come into power by a free vote. The Nazi vote in 1932 was actually on the decline. In spite of that fact Hindenburg, who had been elected President by Social Democratic votes to keep Hitler out, in January, 1933, sent for him and made him Chancellor. Then followed the reign of terror, the well-staged Reichstag fire, and the *unfree* votes which were subsequently used to ratify the accomplished fact of dictatorship.

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LABOUR AND SANCTION

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Sir,—At a time when the Trades Union Congress and the Communist Party have miraculously managed to take a common view of the Italo-Abyssinian question, it is odd to find the I.L.P. persisting in splendid isolation. The answer to Mr. Fennder Brockway is surely this. What we have, as Socialists, to consider is not the interests of this or that Empire, or even the interests of Abyssinia, but those of International Socialism. The deadliest enemies of this are the Fascists, and especially the Fascist Government of Italy and the Nazi Government of Germany. No competent observer expects the overthrow of either by an internal revolution, except in the event of an unsuccessful war. It follows that it is "up to" us to see that when these Fascist Governments get involved in war that war shall be unsuccessful. In short, Socialists should support sanctions against Mussolini for the identical reason for which Sir Oswald Mosley opposes them. This is not to say that we should "commit ourselves to support British Imperialism" to the length, say, of countenancing the acceptance of the office by Labour Leaders in a National Government. That would be disastrous. Socialists, inside and outside the Labour Party, must retain their political independence and their freedom to state the Socialist position on sanctions, which is not the same as the National position. They must also be free to revert to uncompromising opposition if, and when, the successful applications of sanctions brings about the revolutionary overthrow of the Fascist Government, and the installation of a regime with which the Socialists can have dealings. If this could be effected by international industrial action, as Mr. Brockway recommends, such action would of course be preferable. But who believes that it could? Does Mr. Brockway imagine that the workers are prepared to face starvation for anything so *apparently* remote from their material interests as the

independence of Abyssinia? Obviously he does not. Then why advocate it?—Archibald Robertson

SANCTIONS AND WAR

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Sir,—I may not be able to answer for those whom Mr. T. M. Heron labels Socialist-Pacifists. But as an international Socialist I would like to state the obvious answers to the string of gibes that fill his letter in your issue of January 11th.

No international Socialist worthy of the name has ever upheld, or can ever uphold, the monstrous proposition that "what other countries do is no concern of his." Socialism as an international movement—and the world is too interlocked for effective Socialism now to be anything else—is clearly concerned with everything at home or abroad which threatens the objects to which it is directed. Since Fascism is an explicit repudiation of those objects, international Socialists are concerned in the fight against Fascism. To "tolerate" Fascism would be to betray the cause of the working class and insult the memory of all those martyrs, from Matteotti to Thälmann, whom Fascists have murdered and tortured. To Mr. Heron's question whether there is nothing in the Corporate State "worthy of our sympathetic study," we answer emphatically, "nothing." Mr. Heron rebukes English Socialists for not "turning our own distressed areas into examples of social life in the age of plenty," and not starting "a British Five Year Plan," apparently under the impression that these things can be done without a control over the political machinery of the country, which Socialists have never yet possessed. To his final gibe at the contradiction between no-more-war exhibitions, and the advocacy of sanctions, and the advocacy of disarmament, the answer in short is this: (1) Socialists want no more war. (2) Socialists believe the best means of ending war to be collective security—which, of course, involves the application of sanctions against the aggressor if and when aggression occurs. (3) If a capitalist Government were to go "all out" in good faith for collective security in the above sense, Socialists would support any armament programme necessary for that

purpose and that purpose only. But as there is abundant evidence that the British Government does not intend, and has never intended, to take collective security seriously, we are justified in opposing a rearmament programme undertaken on the false pretences for purely Imperialist objects.

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CLASS JUSTICE

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Sir,—At the Glamorgan Assizes on March 25th fifty-two men and three women were brought up for judgement for various offences connected with a strike last October. Twenty-nine men were sent to prison, the remainder being bound over. According to the *Times* report, a police inspector in evidence described one of the men concerned as "a recognised leader of disruptive elements," "militant agitator of the worst type," who "took an active part in all industrial trouble," and "spread pernicious views." The judge in passing sentence called this man "a dangerous agitator."

No one expects acts of violence in this country to go unpunished—unless, of course, they are committed by Fascists. Perhaps, however, some legal reader of *The New Statesman* can explain whether it is in accordance with British judicial practice to allow a police officer to adduce a prisoner's political opinions and activities, not being themselves criminal, as evidence in aggravation of the offence for which he is to be sentenced. If political opinions are liable to be treated as an aggravation of crime, it is time that progressives of all shades should take note and consider their position. We are evidently still living, for practical purposes, in the days of Eldon and Castlereagh, and the "civil liberties" we talk about are just political window-dressing, if a man can get a heavier sentence than he would otherwise get merely because a judge and a police officer have formed an opinion that he is a "dangerous agitator."

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STANDARDS OF LIVING IN GREAT BRITAIN AND THE U.S.S.R.

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Sir,—Mr. H. G. Wood writes: "There is no reason to suppose that any benefit accruing to the workers in this country from economic imperialism is derived primarily from the abuses of the system." Mr. Wood may reconcile this as best he can with his earlier admission that "the workers have gained something through the abuses as well as through the legitimate and necessary features of the development known as economic imperialism." In this duel of Wood v. Wood a Marxist can afford to be neutral. The main point—and that which distinguishes Mr. Wood as an anti-Marxist—is his claim to draw a hard and fast line between "the legitimate and necessary features" and "the abuses" of economic imperialism. To the Marxist any such distinction is subjective and unreal. Imperialism is a fact involving various inevitable consequences. The "abuses" are as much a part of the system as the "legitimate and necessary features." That Mr. Wood should label the features of imperialism he likes as "legitimate and necessary," and those he dislikes as "abuses," illustrates the gulf which divides those who, like Marx, think of society realistically from those who think in terms of some ideal excogitated in their private study.

The state of the case as regards economic imperialism is, I suggest, this. In any struggle between capital and labour over wages or hours, capitalists are more likely to be intransigent if their whole income is derived from the business in which the dispute arises, than if that source is only one of many. The effect of British capitalists investing money in India, Africa and other countries where labour is cheap and docile has been, on the whole, to render them more squeezable by labour at home than if they had no such oversea investments. Conversely, the effect of labour pressure at home has been to simulate oversea investment, and therefore economic

imperialism. As usual in social development, each of the interacting phenomena is at once cause and effect. The poverty of the Indian peasantry did not originate with British imperialism; but the *fact* of that poverty enabled British capital invested in India to profit by low-paid labour; and that in turn increased the income of the British investing class; and that in turn enabled British labour to exact concessions which, but for Indian and other dividends, must have been fought tooth and nail by capitalists concerned. Moreover, by increasing the taxable income of British capitalists, oversea investments increased the fund available for social services.

I doubt if any Marxist would deny that "skill, training, organisation," etc., have done something to improve the position of those British workers who happen to possess those advantages. That is no reason why the indirect effects of the exploitation of backward peoples should be glossed over. It is an unpleasant fact, no doubt, that numbers of British workers should be indirectly beneficiaries of such exploitation. But—in spite of Mr. Wood's significant readiness to sling charges of "intellectual dishonesty" at his opponents—it is no part of Marxism to burke unpleasant facts.

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THE MATERIALIST CONCEPTION OF HISTORY

Originally published in the *The Rationalist Annual* (1936): 35–45

By Materialism I mean the theory which regards nature as prior to mind, and man as a product of nature governed by natural laws. I do not intend in the present article to argue in defense of this general position. It obviously demands treatment by itself, and I have dealt with it elsewhere.

Those who are Idealists or Vitalists— that is, who regard mind as independent of natural causation—will naturally regard religion and reason as independent facts in history; but if we are Materialists we must look for the origin of political and religious ideas and institutions in material causes. These may lie either in man's heredity or in his environment; but heredity is clearly no explanation. In spite of Gilbert we are not born Liberals or Conservatives, nor for that matter Socialists or Individualists. These are acquired characteristics, and their causes therefore lie in our environment. The part played by natural environment in moulding ideas and institutions is so obvious as to need no stressing. But it does not go very far. Natural environment changes very slowly, while ideas and institutions sometimes change very fast, as in England during the Reformation and the Great Rebellion, in France during the Revolution, and in Russia in our own life-time. The major causes, therefore, of such changes must be sought in man's social environment. In modern times this includes books and newspapers; but the production of these, like that of all other commodities, is governed by economic considerations, so that the Materialist conception of history involves in the last resort economic determinism. In the words of Engels, it "starts from the proposition that the production of the means to support human life, and next to production the exchange of things produced, is the basis of all social structure."

Where a community lives in close contact with nature and with the very minimum of tool equipment, as in the case of primitive communities all the world over, its ideas and institutions will be of

the sort described by Sir James Frazer in *The Golden Bough*. The first form of class distinction among human beings seems to have been between priests and laity, priests being persons credited with some sort of magic power over the forces of nature. Even this elementary form of class distinction is obviously possible only when food production has progressed sufficiently to enable a community to support not only its working members but that ruling class which their labour maintains. It is possible, that is, only when there exists a *surplus product* above that necessary to keep the mass of the community in being. Hence the earliest civilizations arose in fertile river valleys like those of Egypt, Mesopotamia, and China.

The Materialist conception of history finds the recurrent *leitmotif* of human affairs in the struggle for this *surplus*— the struggle of its possessors to retain and increase it and of non-possessors to obtain it. This truth was recognized even by the early historian Thucydides. At the very beginning of his history he observes that "the fattest soils have always been the most subject to changes of inhabitants. The goodness of the land increasing the power of some particular men caused seditions, and made them more liable to the attack of strangers." This is still true to-day. Modern wars are not undertaken except for territory that possesses oil or some other natural advantage. The struggle for the *surplus product* dominates history.

The second form of class differentiation rendered possible by the surplus product was slavery. As soon as it was generally recognized that human beings could produce more than their keep, it became common sense to make your enemy work for you instead of killing him. By the time written history begins slavery is already long established; indeed, without slaves to keep them the ancient historians would not have had leisure to write. It follows that our knowledge of ancient civilization reflects chiefly the point of view and ideas of the slave-owning class. The influence of their position as slave-owners on the ideas and institutions of the Greeks and Romans is obvious. Slavery made metaphysical speculation possible. It is only when a class of men like the slaveowners of ancient times or the

leisured class to-day is free from the necessity of earning a living by struggling with material objects that the question whether matter exists is even thinkable. Slavery bred a contempt for industry of any sort; when Plato wishes to disparage a certain sort of philosopher he compares him to "a bald-headed little tinker." Lastly, slavery bred imperialism. The wars of Rome during her greatest period of expansion were simply slave-hunting expeditions on a huge scale. The numbers sold into slavery during the last two centuries B.C. ran into millions. Slaves cultivated the soil, worked in mines, and performed other mechanical offices; many trades and professions were filled by the scarcely less despised class of freedmen; and the minority of free citizens in the golden age of the Roman Empire amounted to less than a quarter of the population.[20]

According to historical Materialism, "the history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles." Ancient history is full of struggles between patricians and plebeians among the free population and between masters and slaves. Armed slave revolts, however, were only intermittent, and were invariably in the end unsuccessful. The slaves were of too many different nationalities and languages to develop the organization necessary to a successful revolution. The result was that the Roman world was inhabited by a population three-fourths of whom were without freedom, without country, and without hope, while the object of the remaining fourth was to live securely and with a minimum of boredom on the labour of those three-fourths. It is necessary jo grasp this if we are to understand the movement of ideas in the closing centuries of the ancient world, and in particular the religious revolution ending in the establishment of Christianity. When a fundamental need is denied fulfilment in the world of reality it is apt, as we know, to seek fulfilment in the world of dreams. It is the same with communities as with individuals, except that for a depressed community the place of a wish-fulfilling dream is taken by a wish-fulfilling myth. We see this clearly in the history of the Jews. Ancient Palestine was a borderland where rival empires met; and in the clash between rival empires the

[20] *Encyclopaedia Brittanica* (13th edition), article "Slavery."

Jews were always getting the worst of it. Their early religion, so far as it can be inferred from the much-edited records of the Old Testament, seems to have been like that of other primitive communities—a worship of nature-gods, who delivered the goods only if you followed the correct ritual. Unfortunately they did not deliver the goods. Hostile armies swept over the country and carried off the goods, and ended by carrying off the people too. Evidently there was something very wrong. Hence in the later literature of the Old Testament there is a note of frustration very different from the aristocratic serenity which marks the classics of Greece and Rome. The Jews were a conquered people, obliged to bow their backs to the burdens imposed by their various foreign conquerors as well as by their native priests. They looked forward to a day when the tables would be turned on their oppressors, and as that day receded further from the world of actuality their wish crystallized into the wish-fulfilling myth of the Messiah. Judaism was in fact a new mutation in religious evolution, the function of which was to render life tolerable to people who, owing to political and economic circumstances beyond their control, were beginning to find it intolerable. The ruling class among the Jews—the great priestly families—do not seem, judging from the records of Josephus, to have taken Judaism seriously; but the trading and peasant classes, from whom sprang the Pharisees and Zealots, went at it in grim earnest.

By some process of which we do not know the details this Messianic myth of the Jews coalesced with other ideas current among the subject races of the Roman Empire and took shape as Christianity. In dealing with the history of Christianity we are under the disadvantage of depending for the most part on writers whose chief interest is theological. Any rational view, therefore, necessitates a great deal of reading between the lines. Nevertheless, the class basis of early Christianity is obvious. In no other religion of the period is the term “slave” used as a title of honour. New Testament writers call themselves “slaves of Jesus Christ” (in our version the word is unwarrantably softened into “servants”), and apply the same designation to their readers. Celsus, the second-century critic of the

Christians, accuses them of appealing only to ignorant people, slaves, and general riff-raff. We know that the inducements offered to converts were not exclusively spiritual, and that the Christian Church was among other things a big friendly society disbursing benefits to its necessitous members. We know too that early Christianity was essentially an urban religion. Its centres were the great cities of the Roman Empire—Antioch, Alexandria, Rome itself— with their multitudes of slaves and freedmen uprooted from the communities to which they had once belonged and from the social and religious ties associated with them. The very word "pagan"—meaning "countryman"— tells us that the agricultural districts, where the old nature-religions were still a living force, were the last to be converted.

At first, as we know, the Roman government regarded Christianity as a political danger; then little by little they perceived that it might have its uses from their point of view. It is interesting to note that the partnership between the Church and the Empire established under Constantine and his successors met with resistance not only from the pagan side, but also from the Christian. The Donatist heretics in northern Africa, supported by bands of fugitive slaves and peasants known as Circumcelliones, raised the slogan, "What has the emperor to do with the Church?" and the movement had to be suppressed by the Christian emperors. The question arises whether earlier Christianity may have contained revolutionary elements which Church historians and apologists have for obvious reasons omitted to mention, and of which the Donatist movement may have been a final manifestation.

As Roman civilization decayed trade and town industry went to pieces, and the economic basis of society shifted from slavery to serfdom: that is, instead of gangs of slaves working under overseers the land was cultivated by peasants bound to the soil and obliged to render services or pay a fixed part of the produce to the landowner. This was not entirely an innovation. Serfdom had existed alongside slavery in many parts of the ancient world, and it is difficult to say which of them is really the older. The decline of slavery was not due to religious but to economic causes. When the Roman Empire ceased

to expand slaves ceased to be cheap, and as they increased in economic value they obtained more consideration. The status of the slave improved, while that of the nominally free peasant deteriorated, until by the early Middle Ages there was little but a legal distinction left between the two, and in due course even that disappeared.

As ancient civilization was based on the distinction between slave and freeman, so medieval civilization was based on that between serf and lord. In each case the key to history is to be found in the struggle for the surplus product. The biggest landowner during the Middle Ages, and therefore the biggest absorber of the surplus product, was the Catholic Church. From the time when temporal rulers first discovered that the Church was a useful political ally, they endowed it lavishly with land, until one-third of the soil of Western Europe and the British Isles passed into clerical or monastic hands. As the Church became a feudal magnate it followed, as night follows day, that the Church became corrupt. From the time of Bede, who wrote before England had been Christian a hundred years, right on to the Reformation, there is not a time in which we do not read of the laziness, avarice, and profligacy of monks and clergy, and this not from their enemies, but from chroniclers who were monks or clergy themselves; for during most of this period no one else could read or write. Idealizers of the Middle Ages can be recommended to take a course of reading in William of Malmesbury or Matthew Paris. There is nothing surprising in the corruption of the medieval Church. It is the nature of ruling classes to look after themselves first and foremost. The fact stares us in the face throughout medieval history that monks and clergy attached more importance to the conservation of Church property and the punctual payment of Church dues—tithes, firstfruits, and so forth—than to any other consideration whatever.

The heretical movements of the Middle Ages represented the reaction of the more thinking part of the unprivileged classes against the wealth and consequent corruption of the Church. The typical heretics of the heyday of the Middle Ages were the Cathari or Albigenses. This sect was very widespread and went by an extraordinary number of different names, some indicating the classes

of people who joined it. Thus they were called, among other things, Patarenes, or "ragmen," and Tixerands, or "weavers." Monkish chroniclers, who are of course violently prejudiced against them, describe them as clownish and unlearned people, obtuse to reason and incorrigible by authority, who can very seldom be converted to the true faith. Among their tenets were that the world was created by the devil, and that the true end of life was to escape from rebirth by asceticism. The Catholic Church was in their eyes the Church of the devil. Naturally, wherever they had a following the income of the Church seriously diminished. Consequently in the thirteenth century they were exterminated by fire and sword in the crusade ordered by Pope Innocent III.

From the fourteenth century on a new kind of heresy comes to the fore. Catharism had been merely a passive protest; henceforth we meet with active protests, the origin of which is to be sought in changing material conditions. The people of the towns—the bourgeoisie in the original sense of the word—were beginning to count. Organized in their merchant guilds and craft guilds, and protected by charters purchased from the king or some other lord, they set up in each town a ring-fence of monopoly behind which they practised their crafts or trades free from feudal interference. Runaway serfs settled in the towns to learn a trade and become free of the guild. Not all, however, who wished were allowed to do so. The guilds aimed at limiting competition, and men who could not set up as masters had to be content to work as journeymen, becoming the nucleus of a town proletariat. The great struggle of the later Middle Ages was between the feudal lords, especially the Church, and the growing bourgeoisie. In the middle of the fourteenth century the great plague called the Black Death reduced the population by nearly half and, as it killed off proportionately more of the poor than of the rich, completely dislocated the supply of labour. For a time the labourers were able to dictate terms to the landowners, and the latter found themselves as a class getting poorer. Just at this juncture Wycliffe drew attention to the enormous amount of land in the hands of monks and clergy, and suggested that it should be confiscated and given to

laymen. We need not attribute economic motives to him, but it is easy to see how readily his teaching appealed to the economic motive in others. It appealed immensely to impoverished lay landowners who wanted to mend their fortunes at the expense of the Church, to successful merchants who wanted to set up as gentry, and to whom the idea of getting a slice of Church land cheap or gratis was very attractive, and to many smaller people who resented clerical exactions. Naturally the attack on Church property led to an attack on Church doctrine. Much land had been given to the Church by pious benefactors on condition that masses should be said for their souls. Confiscation of such land was plainly sacrilegious unless you were prepared to maintain that the Mass was a fraud; which is precisely what the Wycliffites in the end came to maintain. The economic attack on the Church failed for the time because the great lords were so frightened by the Peasant Revolt of 1581 that they discountenanced Wycliffe, and the smaller men were not strong enough to carry their point alone. But, as we know, the Reformation was only postponed.

Before it actually came the face of the world was changed in many ways. The old English nobility liquidated one another in the Wars of the Roses, and thereby crippled the feudal system politically. The merchant class, who enjoyed a monopoly of wholesale trade, amassed money, bought land from impoverished nobles, founded grammar schools (thereby undermining the monopoly of the Church in education), and developed the clothing industry in country districts under the domestic system. This increased the demand for wool and led to that widespread conversion of arable land into pasture and eviction of villagers from their holdings of which Sir Thomas More writes in his *Utopia*. Thus the two necessary components of modern capitalism, the bourgeoisie and the proletariat, grew up side by side. Lastly, the discovery of America and the rounding of the Cape of Good Hope opened up a wider field for trade.

Catholic historians like Mr. Belloc often write as if the Reformation were the cause of the capitalist system. This Is a reversal of the truth. Capitalism already existed, and the Reformation was the

first great battle which it won against feudalism. Of six grievances which the House of Commons put forward against the Church in 1529 four were economic, the two most important being the excessive amount of land in ecclesiastical hands and the competition of monastic houses in trade, particularly the wool trade. Such facts lent enormous driving force to the attack on the monasteries. Their forcible dissolution and the gift or sale of their land to lay owners—many of them, like the Russells and Cecils, of middle-class extraction—were the most momentous events of the Reformation. Important too was the abolition of Catholic holidays, which was justified avowedly on economic grounds. In 1536 a number of such days were abolished by law, "and specially such as fell in the harvest time, the keeping of which was much to the hindrance of the gathering in of corn, hay, fruit, and other such like necessary and profitable commodities."[21]

Protestantism was *par excellence* the religion of the rising middle class, but it was also essentially a sixteenth-century product. Its essence was the repudiation of the authority of the Catholic hierarchy in faith and morals. To-day such an attack would take a Rationalist form. In the sixteenth century it could not, because the scientific development which is the basis of Rationalism had not yet begun. Those who wished to attack the Church had to use such weapons as they possessed. The chief controversial armoury in that age was the Bible, so that the revolt against the Church took for the time being the form of an appeal to Scripture. Protestants thought they were going back to primitive Christianity. In reality they were going forward along a road the end of which would have surprised them. Their divergent interests led them to very different views of the kind of authority to be set up in place of that which they had overthrown. The rich merchants and landowners who came to the top in Tudor

[21] *Hall's Chronicle*. [Editors: Robertson here updated the spelling. The quote is originally, "specially such as fell in the haruest tyme, the keping of whiche was muche to the hinderaunce of the gatheryng in of corne, haye, fruite, and other suche like necessary and profitable commodities," see Edward Hall, *Hall's Chronicle: Containing the History of England…* (London, 1809), 820.]

England, who helped themselves to the abbey lands, and who took shares in profitable new trading monopolies like the East India Company, naturally tried to call a halt to the Reformation when it had served their purpose. To them the Church of England, with its bishops appointed by the Crown and its liturgy laid down by Act of Parliament, seemed an admirable instrument for throwing a halo of sanctity round a state of things which enabled them to run the country and to secure a lion's share of the good things that were going. Those excluded from this charmed circle—the ordinary traders, yeoman farmers, and middle classes generally—were not so happy. They wished to get rid of the bishops as they had got rid of the Pope, and to have a say in Church and State themselves. Calvin became their prophet. We are apt to associate Calvinism rather too exclusively with the doctrine of Predestination. We must be careful how we do so. Calvin did not invent that doctrine. It was part of Christianity from the beginning; it is affirmed by Augustine and Thomas Aquinas. But while the Catholic Church kept Predestination in cold storage where the multitude were concerned, Calvin made it public property. From the Catholic point of view that was outrageous, for it destroyed the importance of the priestly office. The real importance of Calvinism lay in the fact that it had no need of priests, and still less therefore of bishops. Its congregations elected their own ministers. In the words of Engels, "the Kingdom of God was republicanized."[22] That was the reason why the kings and ruling classes of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries objected to Calvinism, and why the middle-class revolutionaries of that period nailed it to their masthead. The battle was fought out in the English Revolution of the seventeenth century, which in the main was a class struggle between, on the one hand, the large landowners and monopolists, who were for Church and King, and on the other the middle-class men, who were Puritans and Parliamentarians.

The seventeenth century is also famous as marking the real beginning of modern scientific development. This too had its economic basis. Galileo could not have made his discoveries without

[22] Editors: This is from Engels' *Socialism: Utopian and Scientific*.

a telescope. Telescopes were not made in any numbers until 1608, and they were first made in Holland, where they were in demand for navigational purposes. The development of modern astronomy was thus causally connected with the opening up of the ocean highways. Both Bacon and Descartes expected science to yield practical as well as theoretical results. Bacon looked to it "to produce worthy effects, and to endow the life of man with infinite commodities."[23] Descartes hoped to discover a means by which, "knowing the force and action of fire, water, air, the stars, the heavens, and all the other bodies that surround us as distinctly as we know the various crafts of cur artisans, we might also apply them in the same way to all the uses to which they are adapted, and thus render ourselves the lords and possessors of nature."[24] Modern science was from its very beginning power-thought—that is, thought with a view to acquiring power or control over nature; and its progress has been intimately connected with the progress of methods of production and communication.

These developments fostered that way of thinking which we call Materialism. Under this name we may for practical purposes include Deism; for the God of the Deists, like a constitutional monarch, reigned but did not govern. When man, instead of being at the mercy of nature, begins to control nature he ceases to believe in miraculous interventions and becomes a Determinist, for the simple reason that Determinism works. Lecky in his *Rise and Influence of Rationalism in Europe* draws attention to the fact that belief in witchcraft ceased, not through the force of argument, but through "the spirit of the age." Not being a Materialist, Lecky could not explain the spirit of the age. Historical Materialism explains it by the reaction of methods of production and exchange upon human habits of thought.

The early Deists and Materialists were either, like Hobbes; dependents of the aristocracy, or, like Bolingbroke, members of it, and did not intend their Freethought for popular consumption. Materialism first became a revolutionary theory in the eighteenth

[23] Editors: This is from Bacon's "The Praise of Human Knowledge" (1592).
[24] Editors: This is from Descartes' *Discourse on Method*, part VI.

century in the hands of the Encyclopaedists. The economic and political changes which had been carried out in England by the Reformation and the Great Rebellion had still to be carried out in France; and the French bourgeoisie in their struggle with the clergy and the nobility found in Deism and Materialism intellectual weapons ready to hand. Calvinism dropped into the background; for when you are in a position to fight your intellectual battle with scientific facts wrangles over Biblical texts lose their importance.

Just as the characteristic ideology of primitive communities is the kind of religion described in *The Golden Bough*, just as the characteristic ideology of a servile or feudal society is a "revealed" religion of the type of Christianity, so the characteristic ideology of expanding industrialism is Materialism—veiled so far as necessary under some respectable alias, and combined with some sort of lip-service to official religion, which is useful as an "opium" for workmen and women, but plays no part in the beliefs of men of affairs. And here we are faced with a paradox. It would seem to follow that as our conquests over nature become more and more extensive, and as scientific theories are more and more verified by the test of practice, our educated classes should grow more and more Materialistic. This is not at present the case. Materialists are found to-day among the younger scientific workers, in the ranks of the small Freethought Movement, and in the small Communist Party, but not at the universities, nor even at the meetings of the British Association. The Materialistic conception of history has the peculiar merit of explaining scientifically, among other phenomena, the modern boycott of Materialism. The phenomenon is rooted in modern economic development. Capitalism, like every previous form of civilization, in order to exist requires a surplus product (over and above what is necessary to maintain its workers), out of which the various categories of nonproducers can subsist. But, unlike previous forms of civilization, capitalism, in order to exist, has to turn its whole product into money. In an industrialized community we are obliged to sell what we produce; and for ascertainable reasons the home market is unable to absorb the whole. During the nineteenth century

this presented no insuperable problem. The world was industrially undeveloped, and England was its workshop. There were, of course, recurrent crises; but they were of short duration. On the whole industry leapt ahead, and people believed in its endless expansion and progress. Science, which had played so great a part in this expansion, enjoyed immense prestige. Those were the days of Tyndall's Belfast address, of Huxley's triumphant duels with Gladstone, and of the vogue of Herbert Spencer. Scientific Materialism under one alias or another became almost respectable, though never quite so; for the bulk of educated people were convinced that religion must be kept up in the interests of social stability, and shrank from the admission that the Churches organized for this purpose were founded on falsehood. The Church of England is the religion of the old school tie. Still, by the last decade of the nineteenth century Agnosticism had become a fashionable label; and Agnosticism, as Engels points out, is only "shamefaced Materialism."

But from about that time material conditions changed. Other countries developed their industries and became our competitors, and England ceased to be the workshop of the world. Economic rivalry led to the scramble for colonies and spheres of influence in Africa and Asia; that led to naval and military competition, and that in turn to the World War, which in turn made things worse. Industrial expansion no longer appeared as the unqualified blessing it had seemed in the nineteenth century. To-day economic policies are being directed to the restriction of production. Brazil is burning coffee, America is ploughing-in cotton. With economic shrinkage goes a shrinkage of belief in progress and a shrinkage of faith in science. It is not merely the clergy who call for a "scientific holiday." It is not long since Sir Alfred Ewing, the late President of the British Association, gave public utterance to the general defeatism. Year by year scientists like Sir Arthur Eddington and Sir James Jeans publish books of which the tenour is that science tells us little or nothing about the universe, and that we are free to believe, and indeed had much better believe, in some God suitable to our degree of credulity. These books are widely read and favourably reviewed, while those with a contrary tendency

attract little notice. The dominant mental atmosphere is reactionary; and the dominant mental atmosphere is causally connected with the environment of economic decline in which we live. Those who wish to change this atmosphere, and who agree with the foregoing analysis of its causes, will draw their own conclusions.

"SI VIS PACEM"

Originally published in *The New Statesman and Nation* 13, no. 323 (1937): 711

Sir,—Mr. Eric B. Smith evidently attaches an esoteric meaning to the term "progressive." Otherwise he would not make the extraordinary assertion that "the progressive forces of this country" had ever been "solidly ranged" on the side of unqualified disarmament in the face of aggression. There have, of course, always been non-resisters among progressives; but there certainly never was the unanimity he suggests. The fact that progressives support the League of Nations proves this. For the whole point of the League is the organisation of sanctions against an aggressor. Take this away, and Geneva becomes a mere debating society. Hence the present zeal of the Right for the elimination of sanctions.

It is no doubt possible to be a progressive and to advocate the disarmament of democracy in the face of Fascism. But the progressive who takes that line should be clear as to its implications. It implies that it does not matter to progressives whether Spanish or any other democracy lives or dies. It implies the abandonment of all hope of a world order. If we hope for a world order, it is impossible to fold our arms when Fascism, as in Spain to-day, clashes with internationalism.

Mr. Smith should be aware that the "non-intervention" against which Left-wing opinion protests is in reality a hypocritical form of intervention on behalf of Franco. Genuine non-intervention, i.e., abstinence from military aid to either side, with recognition of the legal right of the Spanish Government to supply itself with arms in the open market, would have had much to be said for it. For democratic countries to stop supplies to the Spanish Government and to threaten volunteers with pains and penalties, while Fascist countries send whole divisions to Franco, may please Mr. Smith, but it does not please the rest of us.

In view of the fact that Right opinion is almost solidly pro-Franco, Mr. Smith's suggestion that progressives who oppose "non-intervention" are "being hoodwinked by the Right," and "in danger of becoming the apostles of a newer-Blimpism," is rather remote from reality. His recommendation that we should examine our premises is sound. How sound it is, his own letter is sufficient proof.

Archibald Robertson

RATIONALISM AND REACTION

Originally published in *The Literary Guide*, no. 489 (March 1937): 64

In Mr. Howell Smith's article under this title, with most of which I agree, there is one position that I wish to challenge. He says, "What is often mistaken for Rationalism is anti-clericalism." Can one be a Rationalist without being an anti-clerical?

On one condition, yes—namely, that you interpret Rationalism in a purely theoretical sense. In the definition of Rationalism printed on your front page I read that it "aims at establishing a system of philosophy and ethics verifiable by experience and independent of all arbitrary assumptions or authority." Now "establish" is an ambiguous word. You may establish a proposition of Euclid; or you may establish a Church. If you are content to establish Rationalism like a proposition of Euclid—i.e., to prove it to your own satisfaction and that of such friends as will listen o you, while remaining indifferent to the millions who will not or cannot listen to you—then I agree that you may be a Rationalist without being anti-clerical.

But if you want to establish Rationalism not only in the study, but in the street, and to do your bit towards making a Rationalist world, there are some facts you cannot ignore. One is that an overwhelming majority of children in this country are deliberately educated in a system of (to be polite) philosophy and ethics *not* verifiable by experience, and that all attempts to rescue the children from these intellectual baby-killers break down against the stone-wall opposition of the clergy and the vested interests with which the Church is interlocked. If there is any way of fighting these without being anti-clerical, I have not heard of it.

"Clericalism follows anti-clericalism," says Mr. Howell Smith, "as the diastole the systole of the heart." That is a dogma of defeatism. Both sides may win battles, but one side wins the war. Meanwhile the war is on. Until you can have a society in which

intellectual baby-killing—the inculcation of supernatural, and therefore unverifiable, beliefs on children no of an age to query them—is banned by law, Rationalism will not have that "free and open encounter" which Milton tells us is necessary to the victory of truth. There are only two sides in this war. I range myself with the Soviet Government, which has prohibited children over one-sixth of the habitable globe from being brought up to believe in the bogey in the skies; and with Caballero, who is fighting in Spain for the same good cause, and whom it ill becomes a Rationalist to belittle.

Archibald Robertson

THE INVASION OF FINLAND

Originally published in *The New Statesman and Nation* 18, no. 460 (1939): 894

Sir,—In your issue of December 9th, and in a recent speech of Mr. Herbert Morrison's, it is suggested that the invasion of Finland convicts Stalin of infidelity to the precepts of Lenin. But why? Finland was not the only component of the Tsarist Empire to win independence at the Russian Revolution. There was also Georgia. From 1918 to 1921 Georgia was an independent republic. Like Finland, she enjoyed the sympathy of democratic idealists—notably of the late J. Ramsay MacDonald. Like Finland, economic considerations ensured for Georgia the interested concern of the capitalist world: as Finland has nickel and timber, so Georgia controlled the pipe-line from the Baku oilfields to Batum. Like Finland's, her independence was recognised by the Soviet Government. But in 1921 there was a Communist rising against the Georgian Government, Soviet troops crossed the frontier, and a Georgian Soviet Republic was proclaimed.

This *coup* of Lenin's was condemned by democratic idealists just as Stalin's in Finland is to-day. Yet now we can clearly see that the real issue was not whether Georgia should be independent or not, but whether the South Caucasian oilfields should be controlled by the Soviet or by Western capitalists. Judgment in such cases depends, for all who make a scientific study of politics, not on legalistic definitions of aggression, but on whether they want capitalism or Socialism to rule the world. And I want Socialism.

Archibald Robertson
Bournemouth.

COMMUNISM EXPLAINED

Originally published in *The New Statesman and Nation* 18, no. 462 (1939): 957

Sir,—In your issue of November 25th "Critic" wonders why Communists should "tie themselves in knots." As an old Socialist, who spouted at London street corners when "Critic" was probably at school, and who is now a Communist, I venture to say that the knots are in his imagination. Those of us who to-day look to the U.S.S.R. as the most effective force for Socialism on earth have arrived at that position by a process of exhaustion. Social Democracy went bankrupt in 1914: its bankruptcy became evident even to the slowest intelligence when British Labourism went down in the "bankers' ramp" of 1931.

We support the U.S.S.R. because we consider that the future of Socialism depends first and foremost on the success and prestige of Soviet Russia. The U.S.S.R. is the embodiment of Socialism in action, while the West has so far exhibited only Socialism in talk. Whatever, therefore, advances the power of the Soviet Union advances Socialism. Whether that power is best advanced by military or other aid to China or by a pact with Japan is wholly a matter of expediency. If it came to a "share-out of spheres of influence in China" between the U.S.S.R. and Japan, the accession of the Soviet sphere of influence to the growing part of the earth's surface under Socialist rule would be clear gain, just as the accession of Soviet Byelo-Russia and Western Ukraine is clear gain.

These considerations may not appeal to Bloomsbury intellectuals and idealogues, but they are decisive for every Socialist who wishes to see Socialism victorious in fact, and not merely in debate, and who, in a world given to power-politics, is prepared to face the changing situation with realism and adaptability.

Archibald Robertson
Bournemouth.

DEFENSE OF "COMMUNISM EXPLAINED"

Originally published in *The New Statesman and Nation* 19, no. 464 (1940): 42

Sir,—In reply to Mr. Leonard Whittall, may I be allowed to state that (1) the heading to me letter, "Communism Explained," was not mine; (2) the letter in question was written before the outbreak of war in Finland and had no reference that war?

On the subject of Finland I am in agreement with Soviet policy for reasons sufficiently stated by Mr. Benn and others of your correspondents.

The rest of Mr. Whittall's letter uses the well-worn device of applying a general principle in total disregard of concrete situations and practical possibilities. I fully agree that the writings of Marx and Lenin, who were above all things dialectical realists, will not be found to contain anything so silly.

Archibald Robertson
14 Stourwood Road, Bournemouth.

THE RIVAL CIVILISATIONS

Originally published in *The New Statesman and Nation* 19, no. 476 (1940): 462

Sir,—According to Mr. James Southworth, the war between Western and Eastern civilisation has been going on for two thousand years. The political principles of Western civilisation, he says, are liberalism, democracy and national self-determination; of Eastern, despotic government and imperialism. May I ask him, as a student of history, what part liberalism, democracy and national self-determination played in the policies of the following champions of Western civilisation: Augustus, Charlemagne, St. Louis, Louis Quatorze, Napoleon, Warren Hastings, Wellington, Cecil Rhodes, Marshal Foch, Mussolini, and General Franco? In short, is not his theory, like all theories based on allegedly eternal "principles," so much metaphysical hot air?

Archibald Robertson

FULL CIRCLE

Originally published in *The New Statesman and Nation* 21, no. 533 (1941): 484

Sir,—In the interests of historical accuracy, Professor Joad must not be allowed to "get away" with the statement that the disappearance or reappearance of such evils as torture, dueling, persecution for witchcraft, etc., has anything to do with Christianity. The thousand years or so during which the position of Christianity in Europe was unchallenged were, as a matter of fact, a time during which torture was in regular use, trial by combat officially recognised, and the reality of witchcraft unquestioned. Their disappearance, so far as they disappeared, was due to the "godless" eighteenth century: Voltaire, Rousseau and Tom Paine had more to do with it than Christ.

Pace Professor Joad, the generation to which he and I belong were not "brought up to understand" Socialism, but to misunderstand it. I put it to him that we became Socialists in spite of our Christian bringing up, and in proportion as we revolted against it and fell for the French Revolution, Shelley, Shaw, and Marx. We made the mistake, natural to intellectuals, of thinking that our newly discovered truth would become evident to the majority if we went on proclaiming it long enough. We found out by bitter experience that the beliefs of the majority are conditioned, not by reason, but by the interests of the class who have economic power and the control of press and radio. As a natural result we now pay more attention than we did to the means of winning power. That does not mean that we have forgotten Voltaire, Rousseau, Paine, Shelley and Shaw. It means that we have taken to heart the lesson taught by Shaw himself in *Major Barbara*:

> "Ought, ought, ought, ought, ought! Are you going to spend your life saying ought, like the rest of our moralists? Turn your oughts into shalls, man. Come and make explosives with me."

The French and Russian revolutionists knew it. We had to learn it. Professor Joad has not refuted it.

Archibald Robertson
5 Frenchay Road, Oxford.

CORRESPONDENCE (2)

Originally published in *The New Statesman and Nation* 21, no. 535 (1941): 532–33

Sir,—I pointed out that the humanitarian movement in European morals dated from the eighteenth century, i.e., exactly the time when the authority of Christianity began to decline, and that therefore humanitarian reforms could not be credited to Christianity. Professor Joad replies by pleading "a prodigious time lag." Prodigious indeed! So prodigious—14 centuries all told—that it might have led Professor Joad to enquire whether Christianity *in fact* ever prohibited the evils of which he speaks. Like most Rationalists, I read my Bible, and am therefore able to inform Professor Joad that "the code of ethics prescribed by Christ" completely ignores the duties of States and the rights of the subject, and has nothing to say on the subject of torture or trials for witchcraft. Duelling may be held to be forbidden by the command to turn the other cheek; but as nobody—not even Professor Joad—takes that command literally, we can leave it alone.

It is a pity to see Professor Joad flogging horses that were dead before he was born. He attributes to Marxism the idea that ethical concepts are *only* a reflection of class interests, and infers that there will be no ethics in a classless society! Of course, no Marxist has said anything so silly. Ethics, as Engels makes clear in *The Origin of the Family*, begin in prehistoric society, in the solidarity of the *gens*, before classes are heard of. Once the old Gentile society breaks up and civilised class society begins, ethical values break up too, and become a reflection of class interests. The return of a classless society will mean, in L. H. Morgan's words, "a revival, in a higher form, of the liberty, equality and fraternity of the ancient *gentes*."

Professor Joad complains that Communist values are "centered upon the goods of the body." Belfort Bax long ago disposed of this nonsense by pointing out, in his *Ethics of Socialism*, that the satisfaction of the bodily wants for all is the indispensable preliminary to that cultured life for all which Marxists desire as much

as Professor Joad. Really, it is time present-day “Socialists” began to go to school with their grandparents.

Archibald Robertson

ANGLO-SOVIET RELATIONS

Originally published in *The New Statesman and Nation* 22, no. 543 (1941): 60

Sir,—The simple answer to G. T. G. is that if the Russians had not forced the Mannerheim Line in 1940, Leningrad would now be under German fire from Finnish soil; and that if the U.S.S.R. had not occupied the Baltic States, Hitler would have had his "useful jumping-off place" free, gratis and for nothing instead of having to fight for it. War, like peace, is indivisible. It may be hard for G. T. G. to face the fact that "gallant little Finland," is a gallant little quisling; but such is the case.

Archibald Robertson

THE SUPPOSED JESUS MYTH

Originally published in *The Literary Guide* (November 1942): 145

In the October issue of *The Literary Guide* Lady Simon raises the issue of the practical effect of the Myth Theory. I believe this aspect to be important. There is no doubt that a large part of the attraction of the Myth Theory for the average Rationalist lies in its *finality*. I have heard a member of a Freethought audience in a discussion describe belief in a historical Jesus as "the last ditch" of Christianity, implying that if that last ditch were stormed the battle would be won! This seems to me a mistake. Suppose the Myth Theory proved beyond dispute to the satisfaction of impartial historians. Is there any reason to believe that the Roman Church, which does not even accept Evolution, would then accept the Myth Theory? To ask is to answer. As to the more liberal Christian denominations, some at least would manage to adapt themselves to the new situation by some form of neo-Docetism. Not all mythicists are radically anti-supernatural. Van den Bergh van Eysinga, I understand, holds a cure of souls in the Dutch Reformed Church. Prof. W. B. Smith is a Theist. Drews is reproached by Lenin (in his article "On the Significance of Militant Materialism"; 1922[25]) with pleading at the end of *The Christ Myth* for a regenerated religion that will withstand the "naturalist stream." On the other hand, once God, and therefore the God Jesus, go by the board, it ceases to matter to Rationalists as such whether there was a man Jesus or not. No one keeps up an expensive Church apparatus and hierarchy to commemorate a *man*.

Archibald Robertson.

[25] Editors: Robertson errantly wrote "1902" originally. We have corrected this for the edification of the reader.

ANGLO-SOVIET FRIENDSHIP

Originally published in *The New Statesman and Nation* 24, no. 593 (1942): 8

Sir,—The attitude of friends of the Soviet Union is more intelligent than Miss Macaulay is prepared to allow. To make this clear, may I shortly state the steps by which I, a former enemy of the Soviets, became their friend? My progress is probably typical.

For nearly forty years I have regarded Socialism as the one hope of humanity. (See Marx; or, for those to whom Marx is a red rag, see Fabian Essays.) At first, the obvious course for any who took this view was to support the Labour Party. I did so, until the events of 1931 proved that the bankers and big business had the power to destroy even a mild reformist Labour Government such as that of 1929–1931. It was then evident that Socialism could be introduced by no Government that was not ready to take virtually revolutionary action against the capitalists. This ruled out the Labour Party under its existing leadership.

There was one Government in the world which *had* taken such action and *had* introduced Socialism—that of the U.S.S.R. For those who regarded Socialism as the one hope of mankind, there was thenceforth only one course left—to support, through good and evil report, the one Socialist State. This does not mean that Stalin is "infallible." It *does* mean that he is less likely to be wrong about the interests of the Socialist State than you or I are. There is, of course, a case against the U.S.S.R. It is the case against Socialism. But we leave it to the enemies of Socialism to state it.

Archibald Robertson

C.P. AFFILIATION

Originally published in *The New Statesman and Nation* 25, no. 641 (1943): 369

Sir,—Much of the argument against C.P. affiliation to the Labour Party seems to proceed on the assumption that the British Labour movement was a happy band of brothers until some evil-disposed persons in Moscow for the sheer pleasure of disruption started the Communist International.

This of course is not the case. Ever since the eighties of the last century, Marxists, who believed that only the victory of the workers in the class struggle could bring Socialism, have had to face the task of working in and with a Labour Movement which owed its being to the class struggle, but whose official leaders were mostly not Marxists and often not even Socialists.

Prior to 1914 the question was in a way to solve itself. The federal constitution of the Labour party made it possible for any Socialist body, Marxist or non-Marxist, to enter the Party by affiliation and prove its mettle by practical co-operation. But the last war accentuated and embittered old differences by driving a wedge between those who saw in it a war of defence and those who saw in it only an Imperialist swindle. That was the beginning of the present disunity. The formation of the Communist International was only a consequence.

Now that all sections, Marxist and non-Marxist, agree on the necessity of fighting the present war to a victorious finish, the Communist International is logically dissolving itself. This does not mean that communists have repudiated Marx and Lenin. It means that they put first things first. As an old Socialist who was in the Labour Party for fifteen years and has been in the C.P. for five, I am unable to see why the federal constitution of the Labour Party which was broad enough to admit Marxist bodies before 1920, is not broad enough to admit the C.P. now. As to the "open sore" of 1939–1941, if

it is no bar to co-operation with the U.S.S.R., whose line we followed, why should it be a bar to co-operation with us?

—Archibald Robertson

WAR CRIMINALS

Originally published in *The New Statesman and Nation* 26, no. 665 (1943): 336

Sir,—I am old enough to remember the "Hang the Kaiser" campaign. Though abortive, I cannot agree with Mr. Rolph that it was hysterical. It was, on the part of the people, an honest and justified demand that those who made a war should pay for it. On the part of the politicians it was, of course, a ramp. I hail the Moscow Agreement as a guarantee that this time there will be no ramp. Mr. Rolph is concerned about the legality of the proceedings against war criminals. What he fails to realise is that when this war is won, it will prove to be a revolution: indeed we are being forced more and more to give it the character of a revolution in order to win it. The trial of war criminals, therefore, will be an act of revolutionary justice, or if Mr. Rolph likes to put it so, a continuation of the war. Why not? We are pledged to continue the war against Fascism till it is rooted out.

Mr. Rolph asks what the verdict of history will be on such trials. Exactly the same, I suggest, as the verdict of history on the trials of Charles I and Louis XVI. That is to say, the historians of the Right will squeal and try to dress up Hitler, Göring and the rest in martyrs' robes (though it will be a hard job); and the historians of the Left will congratulate us on having proved that dictators, like kings, are amenable to the vengeance of a victorious people.

Archibald Robertson

THE CHURCHES AND THE NEW WORLD

Originally published by Watts & Co. (London), 1943.

I. Protestant Christianity Today

On January 4, 1943, there was published in the Press a remarkable statement in the names of Dr. William Temple, Archbishop of Canterbury, and the Rev. J. S. Whale, Moderator of the Free Church Federal Council. The statement is put forward as an answer—not indeed binding on the Anglican or Free Churches, but deserving at least the respect due to the names of its distinguished signatories—to the question of what constitutes Christianity.

The need for such an answer has long been apparent. With the Catholic Church, it is true, we know where we are. Catholic Christianity stands or falls by the letter of the historie creeds, the decrees of its General Councils, and the infallible definitions drawn up by the Papacy. If these are at variance with modern knowledge and repugnant to modern civilization, so much the worse for modern knowledge and modern civilization. The Catholic Church, strong in the support of the illiterate peasant masses of Southern Europe and Latin America and of those powerful business interests whom it pays to keep them ignorant and docile, can afford to sit tight. But with Protestant Christianity we do not know where we are. Protestantism originated in a revolt—the revolutionary uprising of the merchant capitalists of the sixteenth century against feudal exploitation by the Catholic hierarchy. Living before the rise of modern science, the Reformers used the intellectual weapon readiest to hand— the private interpretation of the Bible.

To-day, however, we have got far beyond all that. The religion established by stout Elizabethan squires and merchant adventurers no longer carries conviction to peoples whose industrial and commercial life is founded on science, and whose relations with Asiatic, African, and Polynesian cultures have acquainted them with mythologies as irrational and as implicitly believed as that of the Bible. The bulk of

educated Britons cling to the Protestantism of their forefathers not from a living conviction of its truth, but from a fear of the possible effect of Freethought on the social order.

The Protestant Churches have long ceased to direct opinion, or even (except in the case of the Church of England when her establishment or endowments are in question) to present a united front. A dwindling number of clergy stand immovably by the principles of the Reformation. More seek to magnify their office by reviving medieval ritual and dogma. Others essay the ingenious but impossible task of reconciling the creed of the Church with scientific discovery and Biblical criticism. Meanwhile the British governing class does lip-service to Christianity, supports the Churches as institutions, subsidizes religious education out of the rates and taxes, and does not scruple to vilify and persecute under the Blasphemy Laws any obscure individual who dares to preach to the masses in their own language the secular principles on which their Christian masters habitually act. In the circumstances we cannot wonder if the question is frequently asked what this Christianity is for which we are alleged to be fighting, which is conceived to be an essential ingredient in the education of the nation's children, and to attack which in unguarded language is an offence at common law.

The statement drawn up by Dr. Temple and Dr. Whale sets out to answer this question. It consists firstly of a short statement of "background," and secondly of a *credo* in four sections, dealing respectively with the relation between God and man; the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ; the activity of the Holy Spirit in mankind generally and in the Church; and the bearing of these beliefs on human action. The whole may be summarised as follows:—

1. "The world exists by the righteous will of the living God," the "creator and ruler of all things," and is "the sphere in which his eternal purpose of love is being wrought out." Men are "free personal beings able to choose good or evil," good being "a right relation" of "obedience and trust" to God and "love" to one another. Somehow (the cause of the lapse is not stated) the "historical process" has "gone wrong," and man from birth is prone to choose evil. Indeed, "he

cannot by his own effort set himself free" from this "curse." So God personally undertakes his redemption.

2. To do this, "God the Son" (the nature of sonship in a Divine being is not stated) "became man, perfectly human, yet without sin or self-centredness." The life of Christ recorded in the Gospels is "a final disclosure of what God is and of the eternal purpose of righteousness which he is working out in history." His death shows "the meaning and measure of man's sin," "the cost of our sin to God," and "the eternal love of God which is willing to bear that cost," and it declares "God's forgiveness to those who repent and believe; that is, to those who give up their selfish outlook and receive the forgiveness which God freely offers." "God set his seal upon this life and death of perfect obedience and perfect love by raising Jesus Christ from the dead, establishing within the corporate life of sinful humanity a creative centre of righteousness, and making altogether new spiritual possibilities for men living in this world."

3. God as Spirit speaks to men "in all ages through their consciences and most specially through the prophets of Israel," but is "known in all his fulness" only in the experience of "the fellowship of Christ's disciples," i.e. the Church. "Though God's redeeming action embraces all humanity and will not disclose its full meaning until its victory is universal, the high ends of his kingdom are nevertheless realized sacramentally here and now and made visible in the life of the Church."

4. Pending this "universal victory," which can be achieved only in eternal life beyond the grave, it is our duty to "seek first God's kingdom and his justice, not our own interest or comfort, and try to make love of our neighbour the rule of all our actions." This can be done effectively only "within the redeemed order," i.e. (as the preceding sections indicate) in the Church. "In short, the creative centre of our effective moral action is the redeeming act of God, who was in Christ reconciling the world unto himself."

To realize how much this statement by two eminent Church leaders is an advance and how much a retrogression, it is interesting to compare it with that famous embodiment of sixteenth-century

Anglicanism, the Thirty-nine Articles. The framers of the Articles had not the wide sympathy and social conscience which distinguish the present Archbishop of Canterbury and some of his colleagues. They were belligerent, dogmatic, and intolerant. But they had the courage of their convictions, and they could think. On comparing the two manifestoes it will be found that while the twentieth-century statement is animated by a more humane spirit, the sixteenth-century Articles have an immeasurable advantage in clarity, consistency, and downrightness.

The Articles, for example, assert uncompromisingly the doctrines of the Trinity, the virgin birth and physical-resurrection of Christ, the "wrath and damnation" incurred by original sin, justification by faith only, predestination, exclusive salvation by the name of Christ, baptismal regeneration, and vicarious atonement. On all these issues the present statement is either ambiguous or silent.

Do the Archbishop and the Moderator believe, or do they not believe, that in the unity of the Godhead there are "three Persons, of one substance, power, and eternity"? We do not know; we are told of "God the Son" and "God as Spirit," but we are not told what these phrases connote; and without definition they are meaningless sounds.

Do the Archbishop and the Moderator believe, or do they not believe, that Jesus was born of a virgin? We do not know; we are told of "the great act of the Incarnation"; but the authors seem to fight shy of the barbaric superstition which demands a virgin birth as its medium.

Do the Archbishop and the Moderator believe, or do they not believe, that Christ "took again his body, with flesh, bones, and all things appertaining to the perfection of Man's nature; wherewith he ascended into Heaven, and there sitteth, until he return to judge all-men at the last day"? We do not know; we are told that God raised him from the dead, and we hear of a "universal victory" hereafter, but the empty tomb, the physical ascension, and the physical return have been quietly dropped.

Do the Archbishop and the Moderator believe, or do they not believe, that, "original or birth-sin … in every person born into this

world … deserveth God's wrath and damnation"? We do not know; we are told in one place that God "makes men free personal beings able to choose good or evil," and immediately afterwards that for some unstated reason (Adam and his apple being no longer considered admissible evidence) man "cannot by his own effort" overcome his proclivity to choose evil.

Do the Archbishop and the Moderator believe, or do they not believe; that "we are justified by faith only," and that works done from any other motive "have the nature of sin"? We are not told; but it seems they do not, for that curmudgeonly dogma is hard to reconcile with the view that conscience in all ages is the voice of God.

Do the Archbishop and the Moderator believe, or do they not believe, that God before the creation predestined some, but not others, to everlasting salvation? It seems not, for how in that case could they be "free personal beings"?

Do the Archbishop and the Moderator believe, or do they not believe, that men can be saved only by the name of Christ? Apparently not; the dogma of exclusive salvation is toned down to a modest statement that God is "known in all his fulness" only by Christians; and we are assured that "God's redeeming action embraces all humanity."

Do the Archbishop and the Moderator believe, or do they not believe, that baptism improves the chances of going to heaven? They are silent.

Do they believe, or do they not believe, that the crucifixion of Jesus was a "redemption, propitiation, and satisfaction for all the sins of the whole world"? They do not say so; they avoid the issue by vague phrases about "the cost of our sin to God" and "the eternal love of God which is willing to bear that cost."

It may be urged that it is unfair to compare a summary statement of belief such as this with a comprehensive statement such as the Thirty-nine Articles, and that even if the Archbishop can be held to be bound by an Anglican formulary, the Moderator of the Free Church Federal Council cannot. In reply to the first objection, I would observe that I have quoted only the salient points of the Articles for

the purpose of the present comparison, and that all these points, except perhaps the first, have indisputable Scriptural support. In reply to the second objection, I would observe that I have confined attention to those points on which the Puritan party of the sixteenth century were in accord with the Anglican hierarchy of their day. The questions of Church ritual and government, which led to disruption in the following century and are responsible for the fact that the Free Churches are outside the Anglican communion to-day, are not here at issue.

It appears, therefore, that Protestant Christianity to-day, to judge by the statement of these two distinguished leaders, has considerably watered down the beliefs held binding on English Churchmen in the reign of Elizabeth. The doctrine of the Trinity has become blurred. The virgin birth is put in the background. The physical resurrection and ascension and the catastrophic end of the world are slurred over. Damnation has grown shamefaced. Faith has almost ceased to be a cardinal virtue. Predestination is a' painful subject. Salvation is no longer exclusive. Baptism is an interesting social occasion. Vicarious atonement is meaningless. The Christian message is reduced to the claim that the difficult business of living is made somewhat less difficult if we belong to a Church, and that the truth, in some recondite sense, of the Church's creed is proved by the efficacy of the Church as an aid to life.

Is this claim borne out by the facts of history, past and present? We shall see.

II. Man and the Universe

What ground is there for thinking that "the world exists by the righteous will of the living God"? We may really omit the word "living"—since no one, so far as I know, imagines the world to exist by the will of a dead God—and re-word the question: What ground is there for thinking that the world exists by the will of any God, or that, if he exists, he is righteous?

It is argued that the world must have had a beginning and a cause. No proof of this has been or can be given. Certain of the older generation of physicists, notably Sir James Jeans and Sir Arthur Eddington, infer from the second law of thermodynamics that the world is "running down," and conclude that it must originally have been "wound up." To all such speculations W. K. Clifford in his Lecture, *The First and the Last Catastrophe*, delivered in 1874, gives a still valid answer. He points out that all such would-be-scientific doctrines about the beginning of things depend on mathematical equations based on observed laws. These observations and equations have enabled scientists to reconstruct the past history of the earth with an exceedingly high degree of probability. But because we can infer that the earth and, we may add, the solar system had a beginning, it does not follow that we can infer that the universe as a whole had a beginning. To do that, we should need to be sure that the known laws of geometry and mechanics were and always had been exactly and absolutely true. Such certainty is unattainable. Our knowledge of these laws is founded on experience and does not exclude the possibility of its being inexact. Clifford concludes that those who argue from observed laws of nature to a beginning of the universe are assuming something of which they know nothing at all.

Even if it were granted that the world must have a cause, it would not follow that the cause must be a God. Sir James Jeans' argument that the universe, since it exhibits mathematical laws, must have been created by a mathematician reminds us of Dr. Johnson's burlesque line: "Who drives fat oxen should himself be fat." The conformity between the calculations of a mathematician and the behaviour of material bodies ceases to astonish us if we remember that the human brain is a product of evolution, and that a brain which calculates correctly has certain survival value in the struggle for existence as against brains which calculate incorrectly or not at all.

But even if we granted the arguments of Jeans and Eddington and agreed that the universe implied a God, what evidence would there be that he was righteous? Certainly none in observed phenomena. Righteousness is a human concept denoting regard for

rules of behaviour which conduce to the survival and happiness of the society which lives by them. There is not a shred of evidence that the universe as a whole is governed by such rules, or even that the earth is. Tennyson, in spite of his strong "will to believe," is forced to admit the incompatibility between the goodness of God and the facts of nature.[26]

Tennyson came of a clerical family and was more of an artist than a thinker. To him the record of the rocks was a message of despair. But to us, grim and bloody though the story of evolution by natural selection in the struggle for existence may seem, it is some consolation that we need not regard it as the product of "the righteous will of the living God," or of any will at all apart from the wills—in so far as they possess them—of the living beings engaged in the struggle.

One result of wholeheartedly accepting evolution and, in consequence, rejecting Theism is that we are freed from any necessity to account for the "historical process going wrong." For a thing to go wrong, it must possess some normal function which on a stated occasion it fails to fulfil. The Theist, who regards the world as planned by a good God, can speak of it as having gone wrong, though how the plan of an omnipotent being could go wrong he will find it hard to say. The Atheist, who does not regard the world as planned at all, cannot correctly speak of it as going wrong. For the Theist there is a problem of evil, for the Atheist none.

Since man was evolved in the struggle for existence, and the struggle for existence is evil—i.e. painful to the participants in it—the fact that "man tends from birth to be self-centred and prone to choose evil," i.e. to inflict pain on his fellow-creatures, needs No special explanation. To state it is merely to say that man is a living being with the common characteristics of all living beings. But it is not the whole truth about man. Human life is no Hobbist "war of all

[26] Editors: We have omitted the lengthy quotation of one of Tennyson's poems as it bears nothing on the rest of Robertson's argument and otherwise crowds the discussion unnecessarily. For the original poem in context, see Archibald Robertson, *The Churches and the New World* (London: Watts & Co., 1943), 12.

against all." Had it been so, man—an animal with a gestatory period of nine months, who needs fifteen or sixteen years to reach maturity and is ill-equipped with natural weapons—would never have survived in the struggle. Since man was man he has been nurtured in communities practising mutual aid. The primitive clan, the savage tribe, the ancient city-state, and the modern nation-state have been as vital factors in human development as the struggle for existence has been. To represent man as unable by his own efforts to transcend his self-centredness and pursue the common good of his group is a grotesque travesty of fact. He cannot indeed free himself entirely from his animal instincts. It is undesirable that he should; they are essential to the life of the individual and the species. But all training and education and all social life consist in subordinating and disciplining these instincts. To these who say that it cannot be done by human effort, that it requires some kind of Divine intervention from without, civilization itself is the answer. The whole technical achievement of man from the primitive potter's wheel to the internal-combustion engine, the whole artistic achievement of man from the cave-drawings of the Stone Age to the plays of Shakespeare and the music of Beethoven, the whole scientific achievement of man from Babylonian star-lore to the generalizations of Newton and Einstein, are the answer.

It is the fashion among our modern defeatists to say that man's scientific achievement has outrun his moral development, and that unless we can discipline our selfishness and become new creatures, we had better call a "scientific holiday" and close our laboratories lest they destroy us. This is to misapprehend the problem. It is not man's self-centredness that is the enemy to-day. The conscript robots whom Hitler and Mussolini have let loose on long-suffering Europe, the airmen who drop death and terror from the skies, the secret police who murder and torture in concentration camps, are not self-centred men. They are much worse. They are men whose whole training and education, whose whole moral sense has been deliberately perverted, and who have been turned into unthinking instruments of an aggressive State machine. In what they do they are not conscious of

sin; they are conscious of duty done. There is no evidence that even Hitler and Mussolini in private life are exceptionally selfish men; but in their public life they are fanatics. Probably each is completely justified in his own estimation. Tirades against selfishness will not help us here. We are not fighting this war against selfishness; we are fighting it against a false religion. The tragedy of human life is not the conflict between right and wrong, but the conflict between right and right. When our Church leaders have marked, learnt, and inwardly digested that vital saying of Hegel and applied it to contemporary history, they will be one step nearer to understanding what is wrong with the world.

III. History and the Christ Myth

What ground is there for thinking that "God took hold of human history and individual human lives in a new way in the great act of the Incarnation"? What ground is there for thinking that the Incarnation took place at all?

I am not one of those who follow Dupuis, Volney, Bruno Bauer, Brandes, Couchoud, Drews, Dujardin, Kalthoff, J. M. Robertson, Rylands, W. B. Smith, and Whittaker in denying that any historical figure underlies the picture of Jesus in the Gospels. But I have no hesitation in saying that "God the Son," who became man—"perfectly human, yet without sin or self- centredness,"—who bore on the cross "the full burden of the evil consequences" of sin; and who was raised by God from the dead, is a myth.

The Incarnation, sinlessness, expiatory death, and miraculous resurrection of Jesus Christ rest on the testimony of the Gospels and other writings which compose the New Testament. What claim have these writings to be accepted as evidence of events which would be unique in human history? The Gospels are anonymous documents; their traditional authorship is attested by no authority earlier than the second century, and (if we except one ambiguous reference to Matthew and Mark, cited from Papias by Eusebius) the second half of that century. Internal evidence shows them to be composite

documents, not the firsthand reports of eye-witnesses. On any showing they are partisan documents; except for one bald statement of Tacitus that Christ was executed by Pontius Pilate, and one or two disparaging allusions by later writers, the Gospel story is uncorroborated by any non-Christian author. Contemporary confirmation is wholly absent. Well might Gibbon exclaim on "the supine inattention of the Pagan and philosophic world to those evidences which were represented by the hand of Omnipotence, not to their reason, but to their senses!" It is on the testimony of documents composed by Christians for the purposes of propaganda, and unchecked by any independent authority, that we are invited to rely for a credible account of the origin of Christianity. Would our Church leaders accept an account of the origin of Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam, or Shintoism which was as one-sided and uncorroborated as this?

And to what are these anonymous and partisan documents supposed to testify? To a life "perfectly human, yet without sin or self-centredness." Before going further we may be pardoned for asking whether such a monstrosity as a being without sin or self-centredness would be perfectly human. What the Church calls "sin" is the manifestation of those animal instincts which, as has been pointed out, are essential to the life of the individual and the species, but which under necessarily imperfect social discipline are apt to get out of hand, with occasionally disastrous results. It is a moot point whether an individual who never, so to speak, "let himself go" would be perfectly human. Even if we accept the testimony of the Gospels that Jesus was without sin, it is permissible to ask in all reverence whether a little of the missing ingredient would not have made him more likeable. A preacher who publicly announces that he is "meek and lowly in heart" thereby invites the comment that he is neither—that, on the contrary, he appears to have an uncommonly good conceit of himself.

The question of the origins of Christianity is one for the historian, and must be investigated in accordance with the usual canons of historical evidence. The historian must approach his task

without theological or metaphysical presuppositions. It will not do to start by tacitly assuming that God became man, and then to review the evidence on the basis of that assumption. That is the method of Christian historians. It is not honest history. We know absolutely nothing about God, and absolutely nothing about God becoming man. We know, however, something of human history. We know how the empires of antiquity arose; we know the structure of ancient society, especially under the Roman Empire; we know the tension that existed between the exploiters of the ancient world and the exploited masses; and we can trace from a great many indications how that tension translated itself into terms of religion.

The nature of religion in ancient society is well known to all who have studied the works of such authorities as Frazer and Jane Harrison. The ideology of the primitive clan or tribe revolves round the business of maintaining and propagating life, or, in two words, round food and sex. Religion originates from magical practices directed to increase food and fertility. The medicine-men who profess to understand these are the prototypes of the priests and kings of later ages, and in course of time develop into the first ruling class in history. Such were the priest-kings of Babylonia, the Pharaohs of Egypt, and the early emperors of China. As savagery evolves into early civilization and class society crystallizes (the priestly hierarchy, with the king at its head, resting on the labour of peasants, craftsmen, and slaves captured in war) the magic or mana credited to natural objects or forces becomes personified in gods and goddesses (a supernatural hierarchy answering to the natural hierarchy which suggested it). In particular the fertile earth, mother of all living things, becomes personified in a mother-goddess (Isis, Ishtar, Cybele, Semele, Demeter), and the corn and wine and wild life to which she gives birth become personified in a son or lover (Osiris, Tammuz, Attis, Dionysus) who at regular intervals dies a violent death and rises again to newness of life.

The original "God the Son," therefore, is not the Christ who became incarnate in Judaea and suffered under Pontius Pilate, but a far older figure—a projection of the annual hopes and fears of

primitive people who saw their food supply wane in winter and waited anxiously for its revival in spring. Of this ancient saviour it could be said with truth, that he was the bread of life, that his flesh was meat indeed and his blood was drink indeed, and that his body and blood preserved unto everlasting life, not the individual, but the clan or tribe who partook of them.

In the last millennia before the Christian era the struggle for existence, which had always conditioned man's individual and social development, took the form of a struggle for survival between great empires which had arisen through the coalition or forcible subjection of city-states. Western Asia, fell under the domination in turn of Sumeria, Egypt, Assyria, Babylonia, Persia, Macedonia, and Rome. In every such conquest cities were sacked, populations massacred or carried off into slavery, lands resettled, old gods and goddesses discredited, and new ones elevated. Can we wonder if, among peoples uprooted from their own lands and imported as slaves into alien surroundings to labour for alien masters, religion took on a new, mystical colour; if life came to be felt as a penance, and the body as a prison; and if the quest thenceforth was no longer for a saviour to perpetuate social life on earth, but for one who should redeem his elect from this world of oppression and evil, and preserve them to everlasting life hereafter?

We know, in fact, that in Egypt Osiris, originally a vegetation god, became in historical times the ruler and judge of the dead who could confer eternal life on his worshippers, and that in Greece Dionysus, a god of similar origin, was in the mysteries regarded as a revealer of immortality. Both Osiris and Dionysus, however, and later on Mithra, were too mixed up with the official cults of the Mediterranean world to be permanently satisfying as gods of the oppressed and enslaved. The way was thus open first to Jewish and later to Christian propaganda.

The Jewish dream of the Messiah or Christ—the "anointed one" who was to avenge the wrongs of God's people on the mighty of the earth and inaugurate a millennium of peace and plenty—naturally attracted many of the dispossessed classes in the Roman

Empire and tended to fuse with the already familiar theme-of the saviour-god triumphant through suffering. These two factors, together with the slump in Jewish proselytism after the repression of the national revolts against Rome, amply account for the rise and spread of Christianity. There are certain indications that the career of an actual Jewish Messiah crucified by Pilate was used as a peg on which to hang a mass of myth drawn from other sources. If so, the real facts have been carefully edited or suppressed. To write as if the Gospels recorded the indisputable "history" of the life and death of Jesus, and to ignore the research put into the subject not only by mythicists but by opponents of the myth theory such as Schweitzer, Loisy, and Guignebert, is to poison the wells of public information.

Christianity, though it originated as a religion of the slave and the outcast, soon ceased to be so; and with its adoption by Constantine as the religion of the Roman Empire it became the powerful vested interest which it still is. To speak of the Christian Church of the fourth and later centuries as "a creative centre of righteousness" is an outrage on historical truth.

What are the facts? The decay of the Roman Empire, which began from economic causes in the second century and became manifest in the third, was not due to Christianity; but it made the victory of Christianity possible. The tough soldier-emperors who tried to hold the Empire together in its throes of dissolution needed a strong spiritual opium to drug the masses into submission to conditions that had become all but intolerable, and, after experimenting with Mithraism, they finally found it in Christianity. The pagan Empire had been rotten and ripe for destruction. The Christian Empire remained rotten and was duly destroyed. Slavery, serfdom, despotism, cruelty, cultural decay, and gross superstition had been features of the pagan Empire, and remained features of the Christian Empire. The only difference was that the Catholic hierarchy, from officials of a suspected and sometimes persecuted sect, became part of the government machinery, acquired privilege, power, and wealth, and after the disintegration of the Empire came to be the dominant element in the ruling class of feudal Europe. The

superstitions of paganism took on a new lease of life under a change of name. Saints and martyrs filled the places of the old gods; "Our Lady" assumed the attributes of Isis and other ancient mother goddesses; and the trade in fraudulent relics became one of the flourishing industries of the Middle Ages. The kingdom of God for which prophets, had thundered and zealots had bled was metamorphosed into a vast international racket run for the profit of the religious orders, the princes of the Church, and the Papacy —"the ghost," as Hobbes truly said, "of the deceased Roman Empire, sitting crowned upon the grave thereof." How this "creative centre of righteousness" defended its privileges, its power, and its wealth against the attacks of the unprivileged, the history of the Albigensian crusade, the Inquisition, and the statute *De Haeretico Comburendo* bears ghastly witness.

IV. Religion and Righteousness

What ground is there for thinking that "God, who as Spirit is ever active among men—speaking to them in all ages through their consciences and most specially through the prophets of Israel—is now known in all his fulness only in the experience of those whose hearts are open to his love in Christ; that is, those who are brought into the movement of God's new creative work in history, which is the fellowship of Christ's disciples and is called the Church"?

We can divide this sentence into three distinct propositions.

1. God speaks to men in all ages through their consciences.

2. God spoke to men "most specially" (i.e., more clearly than elsewhere and at other times) through the Hebrew prophets.

3. God is known in all his fulness only in the experience of members of the Christian Church.

1. If God speaks to men in all ages through their consciences, it is remarkable that the dictates of conscience in different societies, and even in different individuals of the same society, should be so various. Certain features, it is true, must in the nature of the case characterize all moral codes—the duty, for example, to abstain from

specified forms of mutual injury and to render specified forms of mutual aid. But this is the barest outline. The manner in which it is filled in differs from one society to another and from one group to another within a given society.

The obligations of primitive man are as a rule restricted to members of his clan or tribe. Outside the tribe he may, and indeed is expected to, indulge in head-hunting, cannibalism, and similar practices. Inside the tribe, on the other hand, he is surrounded by taboos (for example, in the matter of exogamy and totemism) which to civilized people seem extraordinary and unaccountable, but to him are sacred obligations. The Hebrews of the Old Testament held it meritorious to exterminate Canaanites or Amalekites, but among themselves observed a relatively high standard of behaviour, together with a multitude of ritual and dietary taboos which strike us as irrational and meaningless. The Greeks of the Homeric age and the Vikings of the Dark Ages sang the praises of piracy and pillage, but were comparatively civilized in the domestic circle.

In every society the economic relations on which it rests are, on the whole, taken for granted and approved. The loftiest thinkers of the ancient world justified the institution of slavery; and Cato, the sternest of Roman moralists, exhibits the most callous attitude to his human chattels. Medieval Churchmen clung tenaciously to the feudal serfdom on which the great religious orders depended for their wealth and ease. The evils of wage-slavery at the worst period of the Industrial Revolution found complacent apologists in men of light and leading at that time. Wilberforce, the protagonist of the fight against the negro slave trade, had no sympathy to spare for the sweated mill-hands of his native Yorkshire, and he supported the Combination Laws on the ground that the legalization of trade unions would lead to a dangerous rise in wages. Down to our own day it has been broadly true, as Karl Marx said, that the Church of England would more readily pardon attacks upon its Thirty-nine Articles than upon one thirty-ninth part of its income.[27] In very recent years we have seen influential and presumably conscientious Englishmen

[27] Editors: This is a slight paraphrase from *Das Kapital*, vol. 1, preface.

condoning the vilest brutalities of Mussolini and Hitler on the ground that those dictators had saved their countries from Bolshevism, and persisting in that condonation right up to the beginning of the present war—when it ceased to be expedient.

The question of war itself has been the subject of the most contradictory pronouncements, all equally conscientious. In primitive society all wars in which the tribe engages are *ipso facto* just to all members of the tribe. In the ancient world, at times of acute class cleavage within the city-state, it began to be felt that a war might not be a good thing equally for all classes of society; thus in the comedies of Aristophanes we find the poet voicing the grievances of the agricultural interest and demanding an end to a war which benefited only the profiteers and the townsmen. This is not yet a conscientious objection to war as such. That seems to have gradually developed as the growing strength first of the Macedonian and then of the Roman Empire made any armed resistance to them by subject peoples and classes increasingly hopeless. There is no question that the early Christians, until the time of Constantine, were preponderantly pacifists; and conscientious objectors to war to-day, who take their stand on religious grounds, quite consistently appeal to the letter of the New Testament. The great majority of us, however, including the Archbishop of Canterbury, do not regard the Gospel commands, "Resist not him that is evil" and "Love your enemies," as good reasons for refusing service in war; and in so thinking we are just as conscientious as the pacifist.

Conscience, in fact, so far from being the voice of God, is a function varying with the age, country, and social class in which we are born and bred, the education we receive, the friends we make, the books we read, and the critical faculties we exercise. Sir Richard Burton hardly put it too strongly when he wrote:

> There is no good, there is no bad; these be the whims of mortal will:
> What works me weal, that call I good; what hurts and harms, I hold as ill.

They change with race, they shift with space, and in the veriest span of time
Each wrong has worn a virtue's crown, each right been banned as sin or crime.

2. Is there any ground for thinking that the authors of the prophetical books of the Old Testament were in any sense uniquely inspired by God?

Let us grant at the outset the interest and value of that literature as poetry, and as a record of the reaction of sensitive and intelligent minds to the social and political cataclysms that rocked ancient society during the last few centuries before the Christian era. Some of the prophets have a noble passion for social justice; some express with a moving pathos their grief at the catastrophes of their nation; some lash the superstitions of polytheism with a scorn worthy of a Freethinker. But what evidence is there of any insight into human affairs not to be paralleled elsewhere?

The writings of the Hebrew prophets had the good fortune to be preserved by the Jews and later by the Christians for a reason that had nothing to do with their real merits. They were supposed to have testified in advance to the advent of the Messiah, identified by the Christians with Jesus Christ. Many passages once generally regarded as of this nature are now admitted by all scholars to have no Messianic reference at all. Isaiah's alleged prophecy of the virgin birth rests on a mistranslation, and is shown by its context to refer wholly to contemporary politics. The poems on the suffering "servant of Jahveh" in the later chapters of Isaiah, once thought to be specific prophecies of the Passion, are now no longer regarded as Messianic; they refer either to some forgotten individual of the writer's own period or (more likely) to the suffering Jewish people themselves. Those prophecies which are indisputably Messianic are connected with one or another of the movements for Jewish independence which occurred during the Persian and Macedonian periods, and are interesting only as monuments of the restless hopes of a better world which have always animated that sorely tried people.

There is no reason to think that such aspirations were peculiar to the Jews. By a historical accident their writings happen to have been preserved, while parallel manifestoes circulated among other ancient peoples, not being of interest to theologians, have perished. That other peoples produced analogous literature is certain. We must remember that the classical authors whose works have come down to us represent almost exclusively the wealthy slave-owning and ruling classes of Greece and Rome. We have accounts by Thucydides and Xenophon of the wars and revolutions that ended the great age of Greece; but we have no version of the events from the plebeian or slave point of view. Yet we know from the satirical references of Aristophanes that prophecies of a good time coming circulated among the Athenian democracy. Similarly every public-school boy knows Cicero's version of the conspiracy of Catiline; but the hopes and fears of the obscure men who followed Catiline to the death have been forgotten. *Carent vate sacro*; any literature they had has perished.

Even taking classical literature as it is, we have every reason to reject the claim to unique nobility put forward on behalf of Jewish prophecy. We have the *Agamemnon* of Aeschylus with its picture of the consequences of sin and its lesson of wisdom learnt by suffering. We have the *Antigone* of Sophocles with its appeal from the law of the city-state to the older law of clan-solidarity. We have the tragedies of Euripides with their exposure of the established injustices of Greek society. We have the *Apology* of Socrates, as reported by Plato, with its defence of free enquiry and its simple agnosticism about a hereafter. We have the poem of Lucretius with its denunciation of superstition and its philosophic contempt for death. These, equally with Hebrew literature, are part of the cultural heritage of mankind.

Why must we suppose that God spoke to men through the one set of writings rather than through the other? Why may we not hold that the human spirit, hammered into self-consciousness by millennia of struggle against natural environment and against the foes of its own household, was equally capable of producing both?

3. Is there any ground for thinking that the Christian Church possesses, or at any time possessed, a peculiar knowledge of the mind of God?

Something was said about this claim of the Church at the end of the last chapter. As Protestants, the authors of the statement before us may, if they like, repudiate any responsibility for the record of the Roman Church. Dr. Temple, however, can hardly repudiate his predecessors in the see of Canterbury. I shall therefore confine my attention to English Church history since the Reformation.

Whether the Anglican Church is a "redeemed society" or not is open to debate. What is certain is that the Church as a corporate body independent of Rome is the creation of the Parliaments of Henry VIII and Elizabeth. The Elizabethan settlement of religion was imposed by the deprivation of all the existing bishops except one, the imprisonment of some, the exile of others, and the ejection of a number of the lower clergy. The use of the English liturgy was enforced by law; failure to attend service was punished by fines; and after the Pope had excommunicated Elizabeth, anyone saying or hearing the Latin Mass was declared by Act of Parliament to be guilty of high treason. If that was not a revolution in religion, I do not know what is.

At the same time, anyone who wished to carry the Reformation further than Elizabeth and her advisers was liable to dire penalties. In 1579 Matthew Hamont was condemned by the Bishop of Norwich for denying the divinity of Christ and the truth of the New Testament, and after his ears had been cut off was burnt alive in the castle ditch. Other executions for similar views followed. Thus the Church of England, like the Church of Rome, was watered with the blood of heretics. Under James I Bartholomew Legate and Edward Wightman were burnt for denying the Trinity; and it is noteworthy that Laud, afterwards Archbishop of Canterbury, was active in the proceedings against Wightman.

The Church of England, administered by bishops who were royal nominees, was in fact an excellent instrument in the hands of the Tudors and Stuarts (and the new aristocracy enriched by them) for

discouraging "dangerous thoughts" among the middle and lower classes. When autocracy crashed, the Church of England (like the Orthodox Church of Russia in similar circumstances in our own day) inevitably went down with it. The only party in the seventeenth century who stood for unlimited religious liberty were the Levellers; and their sole supporter in Parliament was the Freethinker, Republican, and regicide, Henry Marten.

The bishops were restored to their former power and dignity after the Restoration, only to have to swallow the bitter pill of toleration at the Whig Revolution of 1688. Thereafter the Church of England fell into a condition of comfortable coma, but awoke with a shock under the impact of the French Revolution. That event frightened the wealthier classes out of the Deism fashionable throughout the eighteenth century, and convinced them of the necessity of supernatural beliefs as a bulwark of the social order. The result was the Evangelical movement, whose leading ornament, Wilberforce, was as insensitive to the horrors of the Industrial Revolution as he was sensitive to those of the slave trade.

It may safely be said that every movement for the betterment of the condition of the people in the eighteenth, nineteenth, and twentieth centuries has originated outside, not inside the Church. Robert Owen, the initiator of factory reform and popular education, rejected all existing religions and relied on good environment to produce good citizens. In 1807 a Bill was introduced into Parliament by Whitbread for establishing elementary schools at the cost of the rates; the House of Commons whittled it down and the House of Lords, on the motion of Lord Chancellor Eldon and Manners-Sutton, Archbishop of Canterbury, rejected it outright. To forestall such dangerous measures, Manners-Sutton and others founded, in 1811, the National Society for Promoting the Education of the Poor in the Principles of the Established Church. In 1810 Romilly introduced a Bill to abolish the death penalty for shoplifting. The House of Lords rejected it, Manners-Sutton and six other bishops voting in the majority. In 1813 Romilly tried again; his Bill was again rejected by the Upper House, five bishops voting against it. Bear in mind that at

that time boys of fourteen were actually being hanged for theft, and draw your own conclusions.

I am not forgetting the Christian Socialist movement of the middle and late nineteenth century, and the notable part played by some clergy (albeit a minority) to-day on the side of the people. I give the present Archbishop credit for being more enlightened than any of his predecessors. But before we accept the Church's claim to be "a creative centre of righteousness" and a "redeemed society," possessed of a full knowledge of God denied to those outside her portals, we are surely entitled to demand that the Church shall corporately do penance for her abominable past and show a decent recognition of the work of those who laboured for righteousness in the teeth of her opposition and, when she had the power, her persecution.

V. Man His Own Master

Since we have no reason to believe that the world was created by a righteous God, or that that God became man in the person of Jesus Christ, or that that God has vested peculiar moral authority in the Christian Church, it follows that we reject the claim of Dr. Temple and Dr. Whale that the good life can be lived effectively only within the "redeemed order" of the Church. Similarly we reject the doctrine that our mortal life is a preparation for an "eternal life" in which God will achieve final victory and all riddles will be solved. The sole ground for belief in an eternal life would be a Divine revelation imparted through some authority recognized as infallible. The Roman Catholic Church claims to be that authority. But Dr. Temple and Dr. Whale do not admit her claims and do not, so far as I understand, profess to set up any alternative authority. Their whole position seems to rest in the last resort on their personal "We believe" and on that full knowledge of God which they declare to be the peculiar possession of members of the Church. Such a circular argument will convince nobody who is not antecedently disposed to swallow it whole.

Nevertheless it would be a great mistake to underestimate the strength of the Church's position. That strength is not logical, but

psychological. It resides, not in the demonstrability of the Church's doctrine, but in the nature of the human need which that doctrine is put forward to meet. That need can be shortly summed up thus: Something is wrong with the world; we need an explanation and a remedy; and the Church claims to supply the explanation and the remedy.

The record of the Church, as I have shown, is not calculated to inspire confidence in either her explanation or her remedy. What of her diagnosis? If that is erroneous, it is not surprising that her explanation should be a myth and her remedy a quack medicine. I hope to show now that her diagnosis is erroneous.

According to Dr. Temple and Dr. Whale the trouble with the world is that we are selfish and self-centred, do not love our neighbours as ourselves, and do not see in our fellow-man the "brother for whom Christ died." If, they contend, we conformed to this rule and made love of our neighbour the rule of all our actions, God's purpose would be fulfilled and the problems of the world solved.

I contend that this diagnosis is false. The present condition of the world, with its exploitation, its class conflicts, its international conflicts, its mass-hatred, its mass-murder, and its mass-torture, is not due to individual selfishness and will not be altered one jot by preaching against individual selfishness. To imagine that it can be affected by such preaching is to imagine that a destructive tidal wave can be arrested by baling out the ocean with a bucket. The present condition of the world is due to conflicting economic interests, conflicting political interests, and conflicting loyalties rooted in those interests. To love our neighbours as ourselves may be good or bad advice, but as a prescription for this state of things it is simply irrelevant. I give Dr. Temple credit for intelligence, and I do not believe that at bottom he is deceived by the nonsense which his position obliges him to utter. I do not believe that Dr. Temple loves Hitler and Mussolini as himself any more than I do; I do not believe that Dr. Temple could love Hitler or Mussolini as himself; and I do

not believe that Dr. Temple really thinks he *ought* to love Hitler or Mussolini as himself.

Let us be clear. It is not the selfishness or self-centredness of individual men and women which has brought about this state of the world. It was not the selfishness or self-centredness of the individual German, Italian, or Japanese which led to the invasion of Poland, Norway, the Netherlands, France, Greece, Yugoslavia, and Russia, or to the attack on Pearl Harbour. Still less was it the selfishness or self-centredness of the individual Briton, Russian, American, or Chinese which led' to the resistance of their countries to attack. To state such a proposition is to refute it. German soldiers are in occupied Europe to-day not because they are selfish, but because they are obedient and loyal to the Nazi régime. British, Russian, and American soldiers are fighting them in Europe and Africa because they too are obedient and loyal to their respective Governments. In deciding which is the false obedience and which the true, which the false loyalty and which the true, the criterion of selfishness and unselfishness will not help us forward an inch. We must make another approach to the question—the approach of history.

Let us begin by going back to our starting-point—the revolutionary overthrow at the Reformation of the Catholic hierarchy which had dominated and exploited Europe for a thousand years, and the accompanying repudiation of authority which (though few saw this at the time) was to know no halting-place short of modern scientific Materialism. After the Reformation came the age of Galileo, Descartes, Spinoza, and Newton. Science became the ally of industry and commerce; and more and more thinking men began to realize that man was his own master, free to shape his own destiny without reference to those gods in the skies who were merely the reflections of his own ignorance and impotence on earth. This new age of confidence reached its first culmination in the eighteenth century, when the Encyclopaedists turned Materialism into a revolutionary theory and provided the intellectual weapons for the men who swept away European feudalism between 1789 and 1815.

The eighteenth century made promises of freedom, equality, and brotherhood which it was unable to fulfil. That was not because those promises are inherently unfulfillable, nor because the French Revolutionists were too selfish and self-centred to fulfil them (they showed, on the contrary, a reckless spirit of self-sacrifice and were just as willing to face death for their cause as they were to inflict it). It was because they did not understand the conflict of economic interests which stood in the way of the fulfilment of those promises. A conflict of economic interests is not necessarily indicative of selfishness in the persons concerned. Individually they may be and often are model husbands and fathers, good neighbours, and self-sacrificing patriots. The struggle between capital and labour, for example, is not due to individual selfishness and cannot be ended by individual unselfishness. Even more evidently the struggle between nation and nation is not due to individual selfishness and cannot be ended by individual unselfishness. Both are conflicts, not between right and wrong, but between right and right—a kind of conflict which the Greek tragedians understood better than the Hebrew prophets.

To understand the nature of such conflicts demands a philosophy of right different from that implicit in Christianity. We must recognize that ideas of right and wrong, truth and falsehood are as dependent on external conditions of life and as subject to change with changing conditions as we know organic form and function to be. I do not mean to say that we have no criterion by which to decide between one ideology and another. In the last resort, right behaviour means that which conduces to the survival and happiness of the society which practises it; and in defining it we have to take account of conditions as they are to-day, not as they were a hundred, a thousand, or ten thousand years ago. We live in a world to which science, industry, and commerce have given a unity which it did not possess in antiquity, in the Middle Ages, or even in the early nineteenth century. Our criterion of right and wrong must be one applicable to such a world. The romanticists who try to behave according to the standards of ancient Rome or the primeval forest

may think themselves high-souled patriots, but they are a more appalling nuisance than any merely selfish individual can possibly be.

The criterion of adjudication between parties in a civil or international struggle is therefore not: "Which is the selfish and which the unselfish party?" but: "Which represents a social order, a morality, and a philosophy of life adapted to the modern world as science, industry, and commerce have made it; and which represents a social order, a morality, and a philosophy of life left over from the age of robber barons, serfdom, and superstition—perhaps even from the age of head-hunting, cannibalism, and medicine-men?" The remedy for the present evil condition of the world is not the preaching of unselfishness and the roping of all and sundry into a Church whose credentials as a "creative centre of righteousness" are in the highest degree doubtful, but the fighting out to a finish, without truce, parley, or appeasement, of the war against those national and international elements who would drag us back to the era of the robber baron and the head-hunter. By carrying that war to victory we shall change not only our environment, but ourselves, and shall become fitter to build a world order worthy of the technical, artistic, and scientific achievements of man.

In the struggle for a better civilization we need every possible ally both inside and outside the Churches. Personally I agree with Professor J. B. S. Haldane[28] that if individuals are assisted by religious symbolism to do their bit in building and fighting for a better civilization, such symbolism is justified. I would place it on a level with poetry, music, and drama, But I further agree with Professor Haldane that if symbolism is mistaken for a statement of fact and leads people to a false idea of the history of the world in which they live and of the causes of its present state, such falsehood is a bad thing for them and for us. We should therefore be careful to remember that our symbolism is only symbolism, and we should be clear as to what it symbolizes. If some people find religious symbolism useful to express the truth that they are part of a whole (humanity) larger and more enduring than themselves, that in it they live and move and have

[28] In the *Rationalist Annual*, 1943.

their being, and that in battle for that whole against those survivals of the past which arrest its development lies their perfect freedom, then good luck to them. But those who use such symbolism to spread a false notion of man's place in the universe, a false history of the past, and a false diagnosis of present maladjustments do no service to the building of a better order, but confuse our counsel, weaken our hands, and wittingly or unwittingly delay our victory.

TWILIGHT OF CHRISTIANITY

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Even before the outbreak of the present war it was obvious to many of us that the modern world had entered a time of crisis comparable to that which befell the ancient world at the end of the Roman Empire. The signs of the times are too similar to be ignored. An exhausted economic order; a political vicious circle; an established creed in which its own professors no longer believe; subversive movements which the accredited exponents of tradition treat at first with superior disdain, then with panicky vilification, and finally, with placatory politeness—all these are evident material for a new Gibbon in some future century to sift and appraise.[29]

Professor Laski's latest essay in historical analysis[30] is a short attempt to evaluate the later crisis in the light of the earlier. Some of his chapters are mainly concerned with the twilight of the ancient world. In dealing with this he records his debt to Professor Kirsopp Lake, of Harvard, and to the late J. M. Robertson. In applying the lesson to the present, Professor Laski follows his own lights; but his conclusions are identical with those which many distinguished moderns—notably Heine, Engels, and Belfort Bax—have reached before him.

Among Rationalists who reject the Christian "revelation" there are two ways of viewing the impact of Christianity on the ancient world. Some regard the Graeco-Roman world as a healthy and progressive society, which was on the way to a satisfactory solution of its difficulties when (for some reason not easy to see) it was undermined by the malignant disease of Christianity. Those who take this view will find little good to say of Professor Laski's book.

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[29] Editors: Referring to Edward Gibbon's *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* which was a monumental work of classical history in the late 18th century and has continued having some influence and ramifications down to the present day.

[30] *Faith, Reason, and Civilization: An Essay in Historical Analysis*. By Harold J. Laski. (Gollancz.) 203 pp.; 6s.

He ranges himself decidedly with those who hold that the ancient world was mortally sick before Christianity appeared on the scene, and that the new religion, in spite of its weaknesses, performed an historic function in reviving hope among the masses, albeit on an illusory basis, at a time when real grounds for hope were non-existent.

I believe this account of the matter to be more scientific than the other. To suppose that the greater part of the population of a flourishing empire can for no apparent reason succumb to a strong delusion and believe a lie is to assume in mankind an indifference unique among organic species to the things which make for survival in the struggle for life. An account of Christianity which fails to credit it with survival value of any sort is incredible to evolutionary thinkers. Professor Laski, in my opinion, is right in judging the victory of Christianity to have been, in the circumstances of the third and fourth centuries of our era, well earned.

In the modern world the wheel has come full circle. Historic Christianity now occupies the position which the effete paganism of antiquity occupied early in our era. "The most important war-aim that is before us is the recovery of a faith by which we can all of us stand." By "faith" Professor Laski means, not believing in things without reason, but a postulate concerning the aims of life capable of holding a society together. The trouble in the modern world is that, the Christian postulate being now widely condemned as outrageous to reason and morals, we are no longer agreed on any postulate at all. The challenge of Nazism has found us all but unanimous in rejecting *that* postulate. But negative unanimity will not carry us far.

Professor Laski considers that in Marxism the Russians have found a postulate, a "faith," which has welded them into a community able to sustain shocks and to maintain efforts such as no other postulate in this our twentieth century could have inspired. He considers that the common man all over the world vaguely senses this, and that the repercussions of the Russian victories, even more than those of the Russian Revolution, will lay down the lines of conflict in what of our century yet remains.

Marxism and Christianity, while on this view similar in their historic function, are of course sharply opposed in content. Christianity was the religion of a society that had lost its nerve. It gave up the world and the whole of human effort as hopeless, and looked for salvation to a catastrophic intervention from above. Marxism may be true or false, but no one will accuse Lenin or Stalin of lack of nerve. So far from giving up the world as evil, Marxists make it the sole raw material of good, and set no limits, other than those demonstrably prescribed by science, to man's ability to transform it. Christianity offered the masses salvation by divine mercy in another life; Marxism offers them salvation by their own action in this.

Professor Laski is not a Communist. He recognizes the case against Marxism—the great sum which the Russians have paid for this freedom, and the difficulty felt by many Western liberals in seeing that it is freedom at all. That side of the question would have carried the day with the present reviewer before 1931, and with most progressive Westerns before 1941. It will do so with a great many, but I think not so many, to-day. Professor Laski's own view is that the evils attendant on the Russian Revolution have been no greater than those attendant on any fundamental change in human relations and institutions, and that the diffusion over one-sixth of the earth's habitable surface of faith in science and in man's mastery of things renders the sacrifice worth while.

Rationalists (and I must assume there will be many) who find the main thesis of the book incurably distasteful may still find interest and pleasure in Professor Laski's treatment of the parallel between the ancient world and ours, and in his criticism of those writers who, like Mr. Christopher Dawson and Mr. T. S. Eliot, try to make out that historic Christianity still has a positive function to fulfil. Those whose appreciation is not so qualified will derive gratification from the fact that it has fallen to an ex-President of the Rationalist Press Association to pay this scholarly tribute to the first great State to conduct its affairs on a basis of scientific materialism.

THE MODERN WORLD (EXCERPT FROM *MORALS IN WORLD HISTORY*)

Originally published in *Morals in World History* (London: Watts & Co., 1945), 93–116

The Industrial Revolution, in fact, was not only rapidly antiquating the whole social and political order of the eighteenth century, but was creating problems which the philosophies of Locke, Voltaire, Rousseau, and Kant could not solve. The growth of the factory system in Britain was concentrating huge populations in towns like Birmingham, Sheffield, and Manchester and making England the workshop of the world. Adam Smith had expounded the new economics of *laissez-faire*; Jeremy Bentham, influenced by the Encyclopaedists, was subjecting civil and criminal law and the British constitution itself to the utilitarian test of "the great happiness of the greatest number." The divergence of interest between the new industrialists and the existing oligarchy of landowners and burgesses led to a demand for parliamentary reform. For a time the alarm of the propertied classes at the success of the French revolutionary armies caused them to treat all such demands as treasonable or seditious. The effect of repression, however, was only to aggravate the dangerous mass of misery and disaffection which unregulated industrialism had brought into being. The wealthier classes, frightened out of their deism by the French Revolution, had no remedy for popular discontent except to refurbish as a bulwark of social order those dogmas of "revealed" religion which had been obsolescent since the Renaissance and whose revival now was an index of intellectual bankruptcy. Robert Own, who rejecting all existing religions, almost alone among employers advocated factory legislation and universal education as a means of producing good citizens, and later became one of the pioneers of modern Socialism. Meanwhile Napoleon's armies and administrators were redrawing the map of Europe, sweeping away feudalism and serfdom in the countries under their control, and preparing the way for those liberal movements which,

after Waterloo, confronted the conquerors of Napoleon and finally buried the old regime.

The settlement of the conflicts arising from industrialism still lies in the future. The central conflict, that of capital and labour, is in one sense as old as capitalism itself: laws forbidding combinations of workmen are met with in medieval history. But with the Industrial Revolution labour movements became endemic, and manifested themselves first in the destruction of machinery (deemed to be the immediate cause of unemployment and wage-cuts) and then in the formation of illegal unions. During the slump which followed Waterloo, Owen in Britain, and Saint-Simon and Fourier in France, independently propounded the view that competitive capitalism was the cause of the prevailing mal-adjustments, and advocated the co-operative organization of labour as a remedy. All three looked for the voluntary adoption of their plans by beneficiaries of the existing order, and were naturally disappointed. Capitalism was expanding in a world as yet industrially undeveloped; slumps, though unpleasant, were soon over; and few even among advanced reformers thought that anything was essentially wrong with the system.

The industrial development of the world was necessarily uneven. While the factory system was well established in Britain and was spreading to France, it had hardly scratched the surface of the rest of Europe. The liberal movements in Germany and Italy were concerned primarily with political unity, without which further economic progress was difficult. The prevalent philosophy therefore tended to be idealistic—to concentrate its attention on man and to treat the natural world with unscientific impatience. Hegel could, during a tour of the Alps, pronounce "these eternally dead masses" monotonous and tedious, and could call the stars "eruptive spots on the face of the sky." Yet Hegel deserves to stand intellectually beside Bruno and Spinoza. He is the first modern to apply the theory of evolution (albeit in an idealistic dress) to human affairs. Of organic evolution, as later expounded by Darwin, he had no conception; but his view of the world as an interaction of opposites provided a framework into which Darwinism, and much else could be fitted

when the time came. Like Kant, Hegel bases his ethics on the subordination of inclination to reason. Reason, however, means to, not the dictates of the individual conscience, but the interests of the social group (family, city, State) to which the individual belongs. In his early liberal period he regards the ideal State as something yet to be created; but after his appointment in 1818 as professor of philosophy at Berlin he treats it as already realized in Prussia and goes over bag and baggage to the reactionaries—an unedifying end to a great beginning.

Meanwhile the liberal movement which Hegel had deserted was conquering the Western world. Independent States rose in Latin America on the ruins of Spanish and Portuguese imperialism. Greece, after an enslavement of two thousand years, became a nation again. In France the attempt of the restored Bourbons to govern "by priests, through priests, for priests" and to muzzle Parliament and the Press led to the July Revolution and a bourgeois monarchy. In Britain public opinion forced a gradual modernization of the barbarous criminal law (the French had already overhauled theirs after their first Revolution); and a reformed Parliament bought out the colonial planters and ended slavery—an example soon followed by other colonial powers. Profits accumulated in industry were invested in mines, railways, canals, docks, and other enterprises all over the world. British rule in India, which had arisen in the eighteenth century out of a scramble between British and French merchant adventurers for trade and loot, in the nineteenth underwent a change. British administrators abandoned the crude methods of plunder which had disgraced the early days of Company rule and began to prohibit *suttee*, suppress Thugs, build railways, and to an increasing extent westernize and industrialize India, preparing the way unwittingly for the Indian nationalism of to-day. In America the industrialization of the North led to that sharp antagonism between slave and free States which was to end in the Civil War and in the opening of the whole of that great country to free enterprise. As the century advanced, science and invention enabled the means of life to be produced and transported to the ends of the earth on a scale never known before.

The spirit of the age breathes in the buoyant optimism of the early Tennyson.

[…][31]

Liberal optimism was criticized from two sides: by those who did not share its aspirations, and by those who, sharing them, did not believe that they could be realized along the lines of *laissaz-faire*. Critics of the first order, represented in England by Newman and his Oxford following, need not detain us. Attempts to lead the modern world back to the Middle Ages will always fail. Critics of the second order were more formidable. The working classes could not be expected to take the same view of the situation as their employers, and least of all in the "hungry forties." In Britain trade unions had been legalized in 1824; but since at common law they were conspiracies in restraint of trade, their rules could not be enforced nor their funds protected. In France they were altogether illegal till much later. The July Revolution in France, and the Reform Act of 1832 in Britain, had left the workers in both countries unenfranchised. The first real Factory Act (i.e., the first which provided inspectors to enforce it) was passed in Britain in 1833, but fell short of the demands of factory reformers and was amended in 1844 only under pressure from Chartist agitation. The mining industry, in which small children worked all day under horrifying conditions, escaped State interference until 1842. No country other than Britain, except the State of Massachusetts in the American Union, had passed any labour legislation at all. It is not surprising, therefore, that in Britain and France, the two leading industrial countries, demands should have been made not only for universal suffrage, but for a reorganization of society on a Socialist basis.

Apart from the Owenites and Chartists, the most trenchant British critic of *laissez-faire* liberalism was Thomas Carlyle. Early struggles with poverty and chronic ill-health made him intolerant of

[31] Editors: We have removed a long quotation from a Tennyson poem that has little bearing on the rest of the work.

complacency, and study of German philosophy of the Kantian school had inclined him to a mystical radicalism. Unfortunately he never became a disciplined thinker, and he allowed his impatience to degenerate into a contempt for mankind. Thus from a sympathetic historian of the French Revolution and a champion of the Chartists he became by degrees a defender of Negro slavery, an apologist of Eyre's Jamaican atrocities, and an admirer of Prussian militarism. A more systematic critic of liberalism than Carlyle was his French contemporary, Auguste Comte, whose *Positive Philosophy* is notable as an attempt, however imperfect, to put sociology on a scientific basis. Comte seeks the key to social evolution in intellectual development which he tends to isolate from the material foundation that makes it possible. His ethics, therefore, like Kant's, take too little account of the actual conditions under which life is lived, and bear the stamp of an armchair philosophy. John Stuart Mill, who was influenced by both Carlyle and Comte, was a greater man than either. Brought up by a doctrinaire father in the strictest principles of Benthamite *laissez-faire*, he was led progressively to modify that position and ended as what would now be called an evolutionary Socialist. The contradictions which many have detected in his writings are due to the fact that his mind, like the world about him, is in a state of transition. Mill has not quite grasped the dependence of moral principles on material conditions, and his ethics are therefore in the main still abstract; but his recognition that "wherever there is an ascendant class, a large portion of the morality of the country emanates from its class interests and its feeling of class superiority" shows how near he is, without knowing it, to the position of historical materialism.[32]

In 1844 a young German-Jewish journalist living in Paris, by name Karl Marx, made the acquaintance of a young German business man living in England, by the name Friedrich Engels. Both were Rhinelanders; and both were Hegelians "of the left"—that is, they endorsed Hegel's theory of development by the interaction of

[32] Mill, *On Liberty* chapter 1 (date 1859). There is no evidence that Mill was acquainted with any writings of Marx or Engels.

opposites, but not his idealization of the Prussian State or his lip-service to Lutheran Christianity. Both had come to the conclusion that the cause of progress was bound up with that of the working-class movements then agitating England and France. The two men joined forces; and the result was the revolutionary philosophy known as Marxism, though the respective contributions of Marx and Engels cannot in fact be separated. Up to a point Marx and Engels take over the materialism of the French eighteenth-century philosophers, Diderot and Holbach. All that is is a manifestation of matter. Man's thoughts and volitions spring, not from a spiritual world apart from matter, but from the material world itself. Before men can think they must live—that is, they must get food, drink, clothing, shelter, and the other essentials of life. So far Marx and Engels echo the older materialists; but now their distinctive contribution begins. Man, they point out, reacts upon and changes the world to which he belongs; and ideas and institutions are part of the equipment by which he does so. The property relations prevalent in a society depend on the stage of development of its productive forces or tools; and the legal, political, religious, and other ideas current in society depend in their turn on its property relations. Hence there is no eternal and immutable moral law. At certain stages of development existing property relations are no longer a help, but a hindrance to economic progress. When that happens a period of revolutionary struggle begins, leading to a change in property relations, and finally to a change in the whole superstructure of society and to a new social order. Thus, when feudal property relations had become a hindrance to economic progress, the bourgeoisie overthrew feudalism, and free enterprise and competition became moral. When bourgeois property relations become a hindrance to further progress they will be overthrown by the working class, and Socialism will become moral. Morality is the code of behaviour which society imposes on its members. It may be represented to them as the voice of some eternal principle outside society; but this belief has no warrant in science. There is no arbiter between rival ethics except history itself as it unrolls.

The philosophy of Marx and Engels, being incidental to their political and economic attack on capitalism, had little immediate influence. The revolutionary movements of 1848 were not of their making, and except in Paris, were in the liberal and nationalist tradition. They soon gave place to European reaction. Britain still led the world in manufacture, and thanks to that fact, and to free trade, was able to weather the storm. The discovery of gold in California and Australia set business booming once more. The publication, in 1859, of Darwin's *Origin of Species*, seemed to the defenders of free competition to provide a scientific justification for their position. Darwin himself was interested chiefly in proving the development of human characteristics, including morality, from animal origin, and showed a judicious caution in applying his principles to contemporary society. Herbert Spencer had no such hesitation. An evolutionist before Darwin, and originator of the phrase "survival of the fittest," he saw in the struggle for existence a vindication of *laissez-faire* Individualism of which he was a lifelong advocate. State establishment of religion, State regulation of commerce, State relief of the poor, State education, and even a public health service, are all alike condemned by Spencer as interferences with natural selection. Given the minimum of governmental interference necessary to protect liberty and property, he contends that nature will weed out the unfit and at least produce a condition of things in which men will be perfectly adapted to their environment and therefore healthy, happy, and wise. Spencer fails to see that the forms of State interference to which he objects are methods of adaptation to our environment as legitimate (from an evolutionary point of view) as those which he approves, and that his plea for Individualism is really a plea for anarchy. Given the struggle for existence any human group will obviously use the weapons that suit it. Spencer's conclusions, in fact, do not follow from evolutionary principles. Marx, for his part, hailed the *Origin of Species* as providing "a basis in natural science for the class struggle in history."[33] T. H. Huxley, the great popularizer of Darwinism, though no Socialist, propounds the quasi-Hegelian view

[33] *Correspondence of Marx and Engels*. Marx to Lassalle, January 16, 1861.

that the "cosmic process," in the course of evolution, has given rise to an "ethical process" which is its negation.[34]

An important consequence of the Industrial Revolution has been its effect on the position of women. From the birth of civilization until modern times woman was normally dependent on, and therefore subject to, man. Man was the breadwinner and fighter, woman the childbearer and cook. This subjection was reflected in the double standard of sexual ethics and in the exclusion of women from political rights and from the educational facilities open to men. The family was the economic unit; and the head of the family was the man. The effect of the Industrial Revolution was to throw increasing numbers of women into the labour market in competition with men and so to break up the family as a productive unit. In due course economic pressure of the same kind as that which forced working women into the factory, though usually less acute, led daughters of middle-class families to seek careers of their own. This naturally led to a demand for equal status and for citizen rights. The *Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, published in 1792 by Mary Wollstonecraft, is universally recognized as the pioneer work in this field; but it produced little effect at the time. The Radical movement in England during the years after the Napoleonic wars stirred both sexes. Women reformers participated in the agitation which led to Peterloo. As yet, however, there was no wide demand for the vote, and even Chartist programmes did not go beyond manhood suffrage. It was not until the middle of the nineteenth century that higher education began to be opened to women, and not until well on in its second half that they began any numbers to enter the professions and to demand political status. With the growing economic independence of women the double standard of sexual morality has become not only indefensible in theory, but unenforceable in practice. It would be rash to prophesy the outcome of an ethical transition still in progress. Conventions born of long patriarchal domination die hard, as the tumult provoked half a century ago by Ibsen's dramatic exposure of the maladjustment

[34] Huxley, *Evolution and Ethics*. Huxley does not seem to have read Hegel; but the coincidence in thought is striking.

and traditional ideals to modern life sufficiently showed. That they nevertheless die will be evident to anyone who compares the social code of fifty years ago with that of to-day. Promiscuity there is not, except in the imagination of certain clergy to whom every relaxation of their ascetic standard seems a short cut to the farmyard. But there is certainly a greater sexual freedom, a yet greater freedom of discussion, and s repudiation of inhibitions whose only basis is the patriarch's proprietary right in his womenfolk.

THAT RELIGIOUS REVIVAL AGAIN!

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Thirty or forty years ago G. K. Chesterton used to tell the world that Rationalism was mid-Victorian, and that the Catholic Church was the only up-to-date thing going. ("We are all Catholics now," was the way he put it. Turn up *The Man Who Was Thursday*, if you do not believe me.) A generation later Mr. Ivor Thomas, M.P., has invented the same old "stunt." In a recent issue of *Time and Tide* he announces with all the airs of an original discoverer that "there is no fire left in the attack on religion," that "Mr. H. G. Wells and Mr. Joseph McCabe… have discovered no new ideas since they first marshalled their forces," that "the attack is redolent of antimacassars and mutton-chop whiskers," and that among men of light and leading "there has for ten or twenty years been a steady stream of converts to Christianity." He instances Mr. C. S. Lewis, Dr. C. E. M. Joad, Mr. Middleton Murry, and some others of most of whom, I regret to say, I never heard before. I do not know whether Mr. McCabe and Mr. Wells plead guilty to the charge of having "discovered no new ideas." If I were they, I should reply that I do not need to. The changing world automatically supplies the Rationalist with ammunition. He has only to keep his eye on Catholic pronouncements in the newspapers to collect material enough to make Catholicism stink in the nostrils of everyone who knows what this war is about. Mr. McCabe's *The Papacy in Politics To-day* and Mr. Wells's *Crux Ansata* may not contain new ideas, but they contain what is more important—*facts* which tar the Catholic Church with the brush of treason to mankind. Mr. McCabe's demonstration of Vatican complicity with Fascism is a service for which no appreciation is too high.

But it is false to represent Mr. McCabe and Mr. Wells as the only living Rationalists of eminence. The list of Honorary Associates of the R.P.A. includes Profs. John Dewey, Albert Einstein, J. B. S. Haldane, H. J. Laski, and H. Levy; Sir Charles Sherrington and Dr. Julian Huxley; Messrs. H. N. Brailsford, Kingsley Martin, Somerset

Maugham, and Bertrand Russell; Miss Marjorie Bowen, and among distinguished statesmen M. Edouard Herriot, whose release from a Nazi concentration camp is happily announced as I write this article. Surely not a list to be dismissed with cheap sneers at "antimacassars and mutton-chop whiskers"! The influence of these men and women on the "mental climate" of their time is at least as great as that of Mr. C. S. Lewis, Mr. Middleton Murry, or even Dr. C. E. M. Joad.

And what of Mr. Thomas's paragons? I have read Mr. Lewis's *Screwtape Letters*, which Mr. Thomas calls "a classical vindication of one aspect of the Christian faith." What it purports to vindicate is the belief in personal devils and in eternal punishment. It attempts this not by argument but by buffoonery in the true Chestertonian tradition. Mrs. Lewis's devils crack jokes, talk slang, and give tips how best to seduce the young from the straight road of orthodoxy and lead them down the primrose path of science and sin. Mr. Thomas may think this a vindication; I think it a silly-clever exhibition of slickness and smartness.

Another of Mr. Thomas's white hopes is Miss Dorothy Sayers, whose radio plays, he says, "are jerking the minds of hundreds of thousands into thinking about the Christian religion." I do not know about that, but I have listened twice over to *The Man Born to be King*, and I can say this about it. The most enjoyable and convincing parts of it are those which Miss Sayers invented herself. Her scenes at the court of Herod and in the Jewish Sanhedrin, her cockney Matthew and her shifty Caiaphas, are good to hear; even Jesus comes alive when he speaks the lines Miss Sayers writes for him, only to lapse into unreality when she lets the evangelists take charge. *The Man Born to be King* adds to Miss Sayers's reputation as a fictionist; as a buttress to the Gospels it achieves nothing.

What warrant has Mr. Thomas for saying that Mr. Lewis, Dr. Joad, Miss Sayers, and the rest of his collection of defenders of the faith are "shaping the future of Britain"? If intellectuals with an eye to the main chance, if journalistic philosophers and lady novelists who find a goldmine in the Gospels could do that, there would be no need to make the teaching of Christianity compulsory in State

schools. It is because they cannot, and because the Churches know they cannot, that we have the Education Act of 1944.

Whistling to keep up this courage, Mr. Thomas affects to believe that the religious revival is worldwide. He builds his hopes on the friendlier relations between the Soviet Government and the Orthodox Church, on the profession by Benedetto Croce of Christianity of a sort (albeit "without institutions, creeds, dogmas, and sacraments"), on the conversion of the Chief Rabbi of Rome, and on the formation in Italy of a party called "the Christian Party of the Left"! What the conversion of a Jewish Rabbi from his ancestral religion to another religion has to do with a revival of religion, as such, is a mystery to me. As to the rest, Mr. Thomas had better wait. When the Soviet Government disavows Marx and Lenin and establishes religion in its schools it will be time to crow, but not till then. The U.S.S.R. has been fighting a war in which the Catholic Church was its bitter enemy. It is natural that the Soviet Government should, in such circumstances, be polite to the Orthodox Church, both because that Church is an historic rival of Rome and because Russia's allies are unfortunately very amenable to religious pressure and blackmail. As long as Britain and the U.S.A. are allied to the U.S.S.R. we may expect to hear of friendly relations between the Soviet Government and the Church. If by ill-fortune and Catholic sabotage the alliance were to fall to pieces, one consequence would probably be a revival of the former heart-rending stories of persecution in Russia; another, sooner or later, would be a third World War. If Mr. Thomas does not want that he must mind his step. The support he gave to the Catholic saboteurs in the Crimea debate was not a good beginning.

Archibald Robertson.

MORALS AND POLITICS (1)

Originally published in *The New Statesman and Nation* 32, no. 804 (1946): 47

Sir,—You complain that "Communists defend evils in the U.S.S.R. as being right, if they are committed by the State."

Putting aside the difficulty of establishing the facts (as to which much might be written, the lie being still as Lessalle said, a European Power), the answer to your charge is that Communists see contemporary politics as part of a global class struggle to which, by the mere fact of becoming Communists, they have chosen their side and mean to stick to it.

The possibility of a world at peace (a thing of which in our lifetime we have had no experience) depends, in the Communist view, on the victory of the workers in that struggle. From that basic premise all else follows.

You Social Democratic intellectuals swither to and fro with every blast of propaganda and get nowhere. Unstable as water, you shall not excel!

Read your history, Sir. 150 years ago the French Revolution created exactly the sort of cleavage in the world which the Russian Revolution has created in our time, except that the issue then was not working class, but merely bourgeois progress. Suppose there had been a *New Statesman and Nation* in England between 1789 and 1793. We would have had something like this:

1789. *N.S. & N.* deplores bloodshed attending the fall of Bastille, but hopes Mr. Pitt will not listen to the reactionary clamour for intervention.

1790. *N.S. & N.* gives page review to Burke's *Reflections*. While not agreeing with all that Mr. Burke says, *N.S. & N*. remarks that friendship with France is made peculiarly difficult by the loathsome servility with which Mr. Paine and his friends stand by, right or wrong.

1791. *N.S. & N.* deplores provocative diplomacy of the Powers at Pilnitz, and trusts Mr. Pitt will remember that he is a Minister pledged to reform and that Britain's chief interest is peace.

1792. *N.S. & N.* remarks that the events of August 10th and the September Massacres raise grave doubts whether Jacobin mentality has ever understood or will ever understand the Anglo-Saxon way of life. Nevertheless *N.S. & N.* hopes that Mr. Pitt, etc., etc.

1793. War breaks out between Britain and the French Republic. *N.S. & N.* observes that this would not have happened if Mr. Pitt had kept his head and if the Jacobins had understood, etc., etc., etc.

But the war went on just the same, and lasted 22 years.

Archibald Robertson

MORALS AND POLITICS (2)

Originally published in *The New Statesman and Nation* 32, no. 807 (1946): 99

Sir,—J. B.'s estimate of the probable attitude of *The New Statesman*, had it then existed, to the French Revolution does not seem seriously to differ from mine. No doubt you would have sided with Fox—and been as impotent as he. My object in bringing in the French analogy was to stress a lesson which we may learn from history. In every revolutionary epoch there is a head-on clash between the old order and the new, brought about not by "opinion" (in any country, at any time, there are millions of opinions, and they mostly cancel one another out) but by interest. One side endangers what the other has. In every such epoch the new order conquers first in some particular country and is, for the time being, embodied in that country (England in the seventeenth century, France in the eighteenth, Russia now). There is a natural tendency for the old order to resort to force against such a country. The war of ideologies appears to the war-makers a crusade for "Christian civilisation" or the like.

There is one way in which such a head-on clash can be prevented from taking the now extremely destructive form of international war. That is for all those in every country who stand for the new order to form themselves into such a compact phalanx of opposition that their Governments will be unable to make war. But to form such a phalanx it is necessary to be fanatical. A judicially balanced attitude is not enough. If you try to straddle the class struggle, point out faults on both sides and all that, you may be an amiable fellow and produce charming literature, but you will effect nothing. Objectively you will even help the war-makers by supplying them with ammunition against the new order which they seek to destroy.

That is why we who believe that the peace of the world depends on Socialism refuse to waste time in criticism of the Soviet Union. We do not suppose the Soviet leaders infallible; but we are

modest enough to think the chances of our being mistaken are greater than the chances of their being so. Anyway, they have built Socialism in their country; and it has yet to be proved that it can be built in any other without handling capitalist saboteurs a great deal more roughly than any Social-Democratic party seems prepared to do.

It is in season to quote Mr. Shaw. May I commend to the "moralists" these words from *Major Barbara*: "Ought, ought, ought, ought, ought! Are you going to spend your life saying ought, like the rest of our moralists? Turn your oughts into shalls, man."

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RUSSIAN ANXIETY

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Sir,—Dr. Ernest Jones would presumably not deny the following propositions.

1. In the last thirty years Russia has been invaded by Germany three times (Germans 1916–18, Allied intervention 1918–22, Germans 1941–45). America and Britain have not been invaded in living memory.

2. The last German invasion of Russia inflicted such devastation that Russia is hardly in a condition to undertake aggression. America suffered no devastation at all; we, nothing compared to Russia.

3. Responsible Americans have advocated early war on Russia. No Russian has advocated war on America or Britain.

4. The only country which has used the atomic bomb, and so far as we are aware, the only country which knows how to make it, is America.

If these propositions are true, Dr. Jones' remarks on Russian anxiety and Russian aggressiveness, based as they are on experience of the consulting room rather than politics, cease to be important.

Archibald Robertson

THE SOUL OF THE LABOUR PARTY

Originally in *The New Statesman and Nation* 32, no. 826 (1946): 463

Sir,—Mr. Aidan Crawley's political sympathisers cannot be very pleased with him for letting the cat out of the bag. In addition to your criticisms, it may be pointed out that his position is pure MacDonaldism. This reduction of Socialism to a mere "progressive limitation of private rights in the wider interest of the individual," to be brought about by "trial and error" and with due regard to "continuity," was advocated forty years ago by MacDonald in *Socialism and Society*. We know where it led him. Will it lead the Bevins and the Crawleys to the same end?

The fact is that on the MacDonald theory there can be no need for a Labour Party at all. If all that is needed is the application of "liberal and Christian philosophy" to social problems, why not leave it to the Liberal and Tory Parties? The fact that there *is* a Labour Party—that the organised workers have had to fight the capitalist parties in the political field—is itself a conclusive proof of the Marxist thesis that all history is the history of class struggles.

The much-bandied about phrase "Liberal Socialism" would have made the pioneers of the Labour Movement gasp. To men like Hyndman, Morris, Bax, and Keir Hardie, Liberalism was the enemy. As for the idea that Social-Democrats should line up with capitalists to resist "Marxist aggression," one wishes these old stalwarts could rise from the dead to do justice to it! Social-Democracy in their day meant, in fact, Marxism. The question by what political machinery Socialism was to be brought about was to them one of expediency. If Hyndman opposed the Bolsheviks, it was not on "Liberal" principles, but because their revolution came in the middle of a war which he supported. The idea that Parliamentary means alone must be used to further Socialism is a new-fangled superstition which we owe to the influence of the late unlamented MacDonald.

It is symptomatic of Mr. Crawley's lack of realism that he contrives to dismiss the possibility of American capitalism menacing

the peace of the world without even mentioning the atomic bomb. No one would gather from his article that at this very moment American and British reactionaries are agitating for a "preventive" war on the Soviet Union. That, and not "Marxist aggression," is the danger which Socialists have to meet, and to which the "rebels" seem to be more alive than Mr. Crawley and his friends.

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ETHICS IN A CHANGING WORLD

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The Ethical Movement is a product of the disintegration of "revealed" religion. It is significant that the two men to whom the Movement looks back as virtual founders were both ministers of religion, the one a Unitarian, the other a Jew. Moncure Conway, active in America as an abolitionist, after failing to imbue his American co-religionists with his radical creed, found the haven where he would be in the pulpit of South Place. Felix Adler, finding orthodox Judaism incredible in a scientific age, founded the Society for Ethical Culture in order to save what could be saved of religious idealism in a world which no longer left room for the supernatural. The basis of existing Ethical Societies, whether they trace their descent from Conway or from Adler, may be defined as the assumption that there is a highest common factor of Judaism and Christianity which remains valid when the authority of the Old and New Testaments is discarded.

Was this assumption true in 1876? Is it true in 1946? In the sense in which past leaders of the Ethical Movement (notably Stanton Coit) have believed it to be true, I should say that it was an optical illusion. Coit seems to have entertained a hope that the Church of England might be led to shed its dogmas and to take its place as the embodiment of national idealism—an embodiment of which he tried to provide a miniature model in the West London Ethical Society. Any such hope rests, I believe, on a profound misapprehension of the historic function of Anglicanism and indeed of State Churches in general. That people trained in an Anglican atmosphere, who possibly after much mental struggle had intellectually rejected the beliefs of their childhood, might be attracted by a form of service which perpetuated the tradition without the beliefs was perhaps a plausible expectation. But that a generation which has grown up without either the tradition or the beliefs of Anglicanism should have any use for such experiments is a wholly otiose supposition. The established churches have lost not only their intellectual, but their sentimental

hold on the generation to which the Ethical Movement now has to address itself; and there is no use in cumbering ourselves with top hamper.

The disintegration of "revealed" religion which led, among other—things, to the foundation of the Ethical Movement was only one aspect of a revolution which for many generations has been with accelerating *tempo* transforming civilisation. The orthodox Jewish and Christian creeds from which we have moved away reflected a pre-industrial and pre-scientific civilisation in which authoritarian beliefs answered to an authoritarian social structure. Catholicism was the religious superstructure natural to feudal Europe. Anglicanism, which owed its existence to the religious revolution put through by Tudor Parliaments, substituted royal for papal authority, but perpetuated the authoritarian basis of both creed and conduct. The child of Anglican parents learnt and still learns that his duty is "to honour and obey the King, and all that are put in authority under him, ... to order myself lowly and reverently to all my betters, ... and to do my duty in that state of life, unto which it shall please God to call me." That is, the formularies of Anglicanism presuppose a class society and a sovereign national State as ultimate postulates. There is no more room for trade unionism, democracy, Socialism and internationalism in the Anglican scheme than there is for the higher criticism or the theory of evolution.

But in the last three hundred years the authoritarian social structure and the authoritarian beliefs answering to it have been undermined with increasing rapidity and over an ever-widening area. Firstly, by a continuation of the process which disrupted western Christendom and established national churches at the Reformation, these national churches in their turn have been challenged in the name of liberty of conscience—a development logically leading to the secularisation of politics and the separation of Church and State. Secondly, the great age of science which began in the seventeenth century has seen the progressive elaboration of a materialist picture of the world (first in astronomy and physics, then in chemistry and biology, finally in sociology and psychology) by which the pre-

scientific faiths have been elbowed out or reduced to mere wishful thinking. Thirdly, the alliance of industry and commerce with science has revolutionised production, distribution and communication, replaced the local market by the world market and economically unified the globe. Fourthly, the industrial revolution, by increasing the size of the economic unit and replacing the independent yeoman and artisan by a working class divorced from ownership, has generated new class conflicts and made old political catchwords misleading or unmeaning. Lastly, the attempt to meet the demands of the working class while preserving the private ownership of land and capital has led to a ruthless international struggle for markets, raw materials and spheres of influence which has culminated in totalitarian war and in the threat to civilisation represented by the atomic bomb.

These lines of development, political, intellectual, economic, social and international, are inseparably interconnected. All alike are the outcome of that "discovery of the world and of man" which accompanied the voyages of the great navigators and which we call the Renaissance. At times the interconnection of the aspects of the revolution has been evident to the protagonists themselves. The French Encyclopedists knew that the battle for rationality and tolerance in thought, the battle for industrial progress and the battle for political liberation were one. Paine knew that the *Rights of Man* and the *Age of Reason* were interdependent. Shelley wrote himself down a lover of mankind, a democrat and an atheist. Newman on the other side, reasoning correctly from his twisted premisses, saw in science, progress, toleration, utilitarianism and democracy so many facets of the infernal thing which, under the name of Liberalism, he denounced and abhorred. The political Catholics, Fascists and Nazis of our own day, translating Newman's theory into murderous practice, know well what they do and why.

But at other times the interconnection has not been clear. The Ethical Movement was founded in what historians of the future will perhaps call the Antonine period of modern history—the period when industrial civilisation, having weathered the civil and international

storms which attended its birth, seemed to have attained a stable equilibrium. Ata time when Britain had peacefully enfranchised her working class and was listening to the scientific message of Darwin, Tyndall and Huxley, when France had survived the fever and disaster of Bonapartism to be still a great power and a centre of world culture, when Italy and Germany had attained what seemed to be free nationhood, and when the United States had emerged from their Civil War purged of slavery and dedicated to free enterprise, it was plausible to suppose that an era of pacific progress and enlightenment lay ahead. Old faiths were crumbling at the touch of scientific criticism: yes, but the moral law within every rational being could not crumble. Wealth was badly distributed, and the cheapening of the products of industry led to a chronic glut and to unemployment which tended to become permanent: well, the remedy was to moralise both capital and labour and make men better citizens. It was unthinkable that rational] beings, if they thought their thought out, should ultimately differ, or that the consciences of different persons should ultimately conflict. Salvage morals from the wreck of dogma, and the rest will take care of itself!

There were dissentient voices. Marx had denied the identity of the moral law in every rational being and asserted that men's moral consciousness was conditioned by the economic relations in which they lived and moved. Ibsen was beginning his dramatic exposure of the social rottenness and domestic misery caused by men's and women's sacrifice of themselves to an ideal which was the mere mask of an ugly reality. Nietzsche, from an opposite point of view, was attacking the utilitarian principle and asserting the right of the strong to treat the weak as means to the realisation of their own will to power. But neither the German-Jewish sociologist nor the Norwegian playwright nor the sinister anticipator of Fascism could shake the faith of nineteenth century progressives in the sovereign efficacy of reason.

Dis aliter visum. Events have fallen out not as the idealists 'sales they *should*, but partly as Marx, partly as Nietzsche said they would. Prolonged unemployment and wage reductions led in the

eighties to a revival of Socialism in England and to repeated riots in London by men who had never heard of Conway or Adler, but who knew that their wives and children were hungry and that Parliament did nothing for them. British Governments sought a solution of economic difficulties in imperial expansion. Other Governments faced with similar difficulties did likewise. Africa was partitioned in order that the development of new territories might put a period to trade depression and divert the working class movement from Socialist objectives to safe channels. For a time this policy was successful. But the result was a dangerous rivalry between the capitalists of different countries, involving their respective Governments and leading by the familiar road of "incidents," competitive armaments and secret diplomacy to world war.

In face of all this what had practical reason to say? What relevancy to the hard facts of class and international conflict had preachments about the categorical imperative and the sufficiency of the moral sentiment? The trumpet of Sinai gave an uncertain sound, and its hearers prepared themselves to battle with one another. For let us make no mistake. The people who lionised Rhodes and Jameson, who painted the map red, who committed us to the secret understandings which led to the Four Years' War, and who followed up the war to end war by a peace to end peace were not sinners above all men. They were fulfilling the moral law as they understood it. It was the other people, the little-Englanders, the pro-Boers, the pacifists who in their estimation were knaves and traitors and friends of every country but their own. The Ethical Movement could give no lead because its ethics had no political content. Of the public men who were connected with or who supported the movement some were on one side and some on the other—all, according to their lights, being equally faithful to the moral ideal.

Belfort Bax in 1886 had aptly characterised the predicament of the ethical idealist who shunned the dust and heat of the political battle.

> These aims 'won from the void and formless infinite' seem to be only won for the sake of being handed over to the equally formless indefinite ... The sentimental Socialist desires above all things to be broad and comprehensive. Now any proposition conveying a distinct meaning is necessarily limited by that meaning, and must be taken to exclude its opposite, and *a fortiori* the society adopting it to exclude those who hold its opposite. But how can a society whose aims are so high condescend to such matters of detail as *meaning*? How can a man as catholic as the "Brother of the Higher Life," or a member of the "Communion of Noble Aspirations," or of the "New Atlantis Society" be so narrow as to exclude anyone? ... All is possible in the man (or woman) who aims high enough. Danton's motto, 'To dare, to dare, and again to dare,' becomes in the hands of the sentimental Socialist, "To aim, to aim, and again to aim" at an ineffable O—*voila tout*.[35]

An Ethical Movement which is to be relevant to the life of the twentieth century must start from the fact that science, industry and commerce have made the world one, and that moral ideals rooted in the pre-scientific and pre-industrial past and in national self-sufficiency are not only mistaken, but positively dangerous. The Ethical Movement, therefore, should not attempt to salvage the "moral idealism" of the churches—those churches which historically have served only as auxiliary policemen to the feudal or capitalist State, and now trail helplessly in the wake of State policy. for the time being. "Why seek ye the living among the dead?" Rather should we go for our ideal to movements which have their roots in the new world which science, industry and commerce have made. Side by side with the industrial revolution has gone the development of the Labour Movement. From illicit combinations for raising wages to legalised

[35] *The Religion of Socialism*, sixth edition, pp. 99–100.

trade unions, from Owen's critical analysis of capitalism and advocacy of co-operation to the Rochdale pioneers, from the Chartist six points to Labour representation in Parliament, from the new unionism of the eighties to the Labour Party of the twentieth century, this movement, the creation of the people themselves, has gone from strength to strength and is to-day the working religion of millions. Wherever industrialism has taken root, trade unionism, co-operation and Socialism have tended to take root also. If we seek a new religion, a modern faith, a moral ideal with a political content, there it is. In no other movement is there the driving force necessary to overcome those rivalries which have twice in our lifetime bathed the world in blood and which threaten to lay civilisation in ruins. For those rivalries are rooted in the need of big business for expanding markets overseas in default of effective demand at home. Nothing but the ousting of big business from political and economic power and the direction of industry to the raising of the standard of living of the people, regardless of the profit of the few, can eliminate that cause of war. And that is the objective of the Labour Movement.

But, it will be said, this is asking the Ethical Movement to take sides in. politics. That would have been a valid objection seventy years ago. But are we to learn nothing from experience? It may have been plausible seventy years ago to suppose that ethics were a subject on which people of every party and no party could agree. It is not plausible now. For the history of those seventy years, and especially of the last thirty, has driven home the truth that Right and Left have not a common standard of right and wrong. Both Right and Left are capable of idealism; but their ideals are not the same. The good of the one is the evil of the other; the light of the one is the darkness of the other; the god of the one is the devil of the other. I am not writing in the air. In the course of a lifetime not very much shorter than that of the Ethical Movement I have travelled from the extreme Right to the extreme Left. Anyone who has made that rather unusual voyage knows that what I say is true.

I suppose that it will be agreed that the most important result of the First World War was one not intended by its authors—the

Russian Revolution and the seizure of power for the first time in any country by a Marxist party. Whatever may be thought of the Marxist philosophy, suppose it will be agreed that it purports to be based on the scientific approach to the world and on an analysis of the phenomena of modern industry and commerce. Herein lay its novelty. For in so far as the Governments which held power in Western Europe and America between the wars had any philosophy at all, it was a philosophy rooted in the pre-scientific past and in ideas of property and sovereignty dating from before the industrial revolution. The history of the world between the wars must be read in the light of this fundamental incompatibility of outlook. In effect the world was torn by a three-cornered war, open or veiled, between three parties—western capitalism, victorious in the First World War and interested in keeping what it held; Central European capitalism, defeated in that war and interested in recovering what it had lost; and the Labour Movement, badly led and not yet conscious of its power, but in Russia victorious and everywhere interested in ending war and securing a better life for all.

Ethically the parties had no common yardstick. To the Right, for example, the general strike of 1926 was a criminal conspiracy against the State; to the Left it was an inspiring demonstration of working class solidarity. Each after twenty years is of the same opinion still. To the Right it was self-evident that Poor Law administration should be deterrent: "Poplarism," therefore, stank. To the Left it was equally self-evident that relief should be on a scale calculated to keep a family in health. To the Right Fascism (until it declared war on the British Empire) was a welcome ally against the Labour Movement; to the Left it was the foulest reign of terror seen on earth since the days of the Inquisition. The essential unity of the modern world was ironically illustrated by the tendency of big business, regardless of national rivalry, to make common cause against the Left everywhere—in central Europe, in Italy, in Spain, in Czechoslovakia—right up to the very eve of the Second World War.

Is there any greater indication of ethical solidarity between Right and Left to-day, after six years' war, than there was before?

There is none; | nor was it to be expected. “Can two walk together, except they be agreed?” From China to Peru Right and Left, reaction and revolution, the embodied past and the embodied future confront each other in irreconcilable hostility, the eyes of the one on Wall Street, the eyes of the other on Moscow, manoeuvring for position. What, then, is the Ethical Movement to do? The question would be unanswerable if its ranks included any appreciable contingent from the Right. To judge, however, from the reactions of the average Ethical Society audience, that is not so. The Right is far too sensible of the sedative uses of religion to soil itself with heterodoxy: indeed, judging from the vogue of Mr. C. S. Lewis and the resolutions of the Primrose League on religious education, its present tendency is to fundamentalism. The difficulty in recommending a programme to the Ethical Movement is the prevalence not of a Right, but of a Liberal mentality, deriving ultimately from the Kantian presuppositions with which Adler started in 1876.

If the Ethical Movement is to play any part in the social processes of our time, those presuppositions must be revised. Kantian idealism is not true to life: life would be much simpler if it were! Even if the consciousness of moral obligation is a constituent part of our nature, we are not all conscious of the same obligations. It is historically untrue to say that every rational being is conscious of an obligation to treat mankind as an end and not as a means. Was the average slaveowner so conscious?) Was the average feudal lord? Was the average industrialist a hundred years ago? Is the average shareholders’ meeting to-day? Moral consciousness is conditioned by material interest; and if we are to have a moral world, society (as Helvétius saw, but Kant did not) must be so organised as to associate public and private interest. Translated into the language of the industrial age, this means that we must have Socialism.

“But why should anyone believe in Socialism and work for it, unless it serves his interest in the social struggle?” There may have been no answer to this question in 1876. In 1946 the questioner can be invited to state whether it would serve his interest to be annihilated by an atomic bomb, and if not, how he proposes to go to work to

prevent it. Capitalism, on the scale on which it now operates, has proved itself unable to provide us with full employment except at the price of a periodical blood-bath. The dilemma confronting the rugged individualist is today quite literally, "Your money or your life!" If he prefers to chance it, there are plenty of others who do not. The immediate job of the progressive movement, and therefore of the Ethical Movement, is to do everything possible by education, agitation and organisation to increase the number of these latter. As I have said elsewhere, the transformation necessary in most of us is not a change of heart, but a change of head.

It may be asked what contribution the Ethical Movement can make to this process without becoming a fifth wheel in the coach. Political agitation and education are the work of societies existing for those specific purposes; political organisation is the work of Parliamentary parties. That is perfectly true. But the political Left in general is deficient in one thing which the Ethical Movement might help to supply, namely a philosophy. Every movement which has changed the world in the past—Christianity, Islam, the Reformation, the French Revolution— has found a theoretical basis and a guide to action in a specific picture of the world and philosophy of history. The British Labour Movement lives happily from hand to mouth. I am well aware of the sterling contribution which Marxists both in the Communist and Labour Parties have made to the education of the movement. But the Communist Party, not by its own wish, is outside the Labour Party. Transport House, which seems to have learnt nothing and forgotten nothing in the last twenty years, does its best to ban any contact between the two, while placing no bar on the insidious counter-penetration of Catholic reactionaries. This is where the Ethical Movement comes in. By propagating in the political Left a scientific approach to the world and a history purged of myth, adherents of the Ethical Movement will help to supply background, confidence, driving force and staying power to a party with which, more than with anyone else in Britain, rests now the responsibility for the salvation of the world.

But in order to impart a philosophy to others, the Ethical Movement must make up its own mind on fundamentals. All issues, therefore, bearing on our task should be patiently thrashed out in our own ranks. First, philosophical issues. What do we know? What do we mean by such terms as "matter," "mind," "God"? Can we know that matter exists? That mind exists? That God exists? That we are mortal or immortal? If we do not know, have we a right to believer Next, ethical issues. What do we mean by such terms as "good" and "evil"? Have we a right to use them if we do not believe in God? What do we mean by "free will'? What do we know of it? Is there any absolute good? If not, why do we behave decently? Next, anthropology. What is the evidence for evolution? What do we mean by "the survival of the fittest"? Is man a fighting animal? Or a religious animal? Or a social animal? Next, history. What is civilisation? How did priestcraft begin? And slavery? And serfdom? How can we check the Bible? What is the evidence for and against Christianity? Why did Rome decline? What caused the Reformation? The French Revolution? The Russian? Lastly, politics. Give an account (as objective as you can) of the British Empire, the Tory, Liberal and Labour Parties, capitalism, Socialism, Communism, Fascism, the U.S.A., the U.S.S.R., the United Nations Organisation.

By the time we have hammered out our attitude to these questions in free discussion, we shall have turned ourselves into modern equivalents of Plato's philosopher-statesmen. Without waiting for the completion of that process, we should meanwhile do our best to promote similar discussion in other organisations of which we happen to be members, at the same time pulling our full weight in their normal activities. Thereby, I believe, we shall be rendering the best service to the cause of peace and progress which it is in the power of the Ethical Movement to render. The way forward lies not in trying to galvanise into a ghastly imitation of life a ritual borrowed from churches already intellectually dead and politically damned, but in helping to build up in our own country (others will see to it elsewhere) a force which will translate the economic unification of mankind into

the language of politics, break for ever the power of reaction and vested interest, and guide the world into the way of peace.

LOYALTIES

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Man is a social animal. Everyone is brought up to feel allegiance to some whole of which he or she is part. But as to the nature of this whole opinions differ. The tragedy of past and present history lies in this conflict of loyalties—not in the clash between individuals whose aims are through and through selfish, but in the clash between individuals whose aims are predominantly unselfish and conflict for the very reason that they are unselfish.

Most of us were brought up in the belief that the chief object of loyalty was the sovereign State. In the words of the catechism of the Church of England, our duty was "to honour and obey the King, and all that are put in authority under him." This and similar formulae are a heritage from Tudor times, when the modern world was in the making and absolute submission to the sovereign State was the only real alternative to feudal anarchy. Our social, political and religious traditions have descended to us from that time without essential alteration, although the economic structure of the world has changed out recognition.

We, however, who frequent Conway Hall have each in our own way been jolted out of the traditional rut; otherwise we should not be here. One potent agency in the subversion of such traditions is the discovery, made by everyone who studies the past for himself, that loyalties are relative. We grow up believing that obedience to "the King and all that are put in authority under him" is a self-evident duty and that only rogues and traitors refuse it. In civil war and revolution all the good people are on one side and all the bad people on the other. In the case of international war we may (though this is difficult) achieve the broad-mindedness necessary to see the enemies of our country as honourable opponents: they, after all, are fighting for *their* sovereign and doing *their* duty. But a rebel or revolutionist is just a disloyal person: there is nothing to be said for him. Then we throw away the text-books and read history on our own account, and

find that this is not so. The rebel and revolutionist has a great deal to be said for him: he too has his ideal, his sense of duty and his capacity for self-sacrifice. Writers like Carlyle, though not to be recommended as scientific historians, have at least the merit of presenting "the other side of the medal" as correcting the Philistine orthodoxy of school text-books.

In this way it dawns on us that the beliefs in which we were brought up are not eternal truths, but the ideology of a class. The concept of loyalty inculcated on the youth of the upper middle class does not transcend the frontier of class: the masses are just "cads," strikes invariably anti-social and the unemployed automatically undeserving. Our reading of history introduces us to another loyalty—that of Franklin, who boasted, "Where liberty is, there is my country," and of Thomas Paine, who capped it with, "Where liberty is *not*, there is mine"; that of the Paris Communard of 1871 who, asked for what he was fighting, replied, "For human solidarity." This confronts us at once with the fact of a conflict of loyalties. To the loyal subjects of George III, Frankin and Paine were traitors who deserved, if caught, to be hanged, drawn and quartered. To the French bourgeoisie the Communards were *canaille* to be shot like dogs. The loyalty of one was disloyalty to the other. We seem to be driven back to the conclusion of the old Greek "sophists" that might is right and justice the interest of the stronger.

Is there no other criterion? I believe that no cogent criterion can be supplied by pure reason. But the student of history may arrive at a criterion of a sort. The world is still in the making. In Tudor times, as we saw, the modern State was just emerging from feudal anarchy. Then it seemed necessary to those who drew up the English Prayer Book to lay down obedience to royal authority as an important part of the duty for every man and woman. This seemed to us in our youth quite simple and straight-forward; but it was not simple and straightforward in Tudor times. There was a conflict of loyalties then, as now. Sir Thomas More and many others went to their deaths rather than accept the new dogma of royal supremacy: The battle between the old feudal and Catholic order and the new capitalist and Protestant

order was fought out at the stake, on the scaffold, and on the stricken field. The new order won; and obedience to "the King and all that are put in authority under him" became part of the pattern of life for the new English ruling class and their dependants. The Whig Revolution of the next century reduced the King to a rubber stamp in the hands of the ruling class, but it took care to preserve the rubber stamp. In effect, loyalty to the sovereign State as administered by its ruling class became the first principle of public morality.

Since then the world has been transformed by the Industrial Revolution and the domination of big business. Capitalist competition for markets has led to an international anarchy even more destructive of human welfare than the feudal anarchy of the Middle Ages. Frontiers have become an anachronism and nations a nuisance. Yet the duty of loyalty to the sovereign State, dating from a time when the sovereign State was the only alternative to feudal anarchy, continues to be inculcated by school, pulpit, Press and radio, at a time when the sovereign State itself has become a millstone round the neck of mankind. Every vested interest dating from the pre-scientific past—even the Catholic Church—now shelters behind the screen of nationalism. The reason is obvious. The only force capable of making an end of international anarchy is Socialism; and in doing so it would also make an end of big business and of the political power of the Catholic Church. Ever since the economic unification of the world by the Industrial Revolution became apparent, it has been obvious to thinking men that political unification was its natural corollary. At one time it was expected that this would be effected by free trade and *laissez-faire*. This left out of accounting the conflicting interests of the capitalists of different countries and therefore proved a mirage. A stable world order is possible only on a Socialist basis. Confronted with the choice between world anarchy and Socialism, the interests threatened with extinction by Socialism may be expected (especially if they think they have a monopoly of the atom bomb) to see in world anarchy the lesser evil.

Today, therefore, we are confronted with a conflict of loyalties similar to that which confronted men in the sixteenth century. On the

one hand we have the traditional loyalties which have come down to us from that time—loyalty to "King and country," the "traditional England" of which Mr. Churchill is the avowed champion. On the other hand we have the relatively new conception of loyalty to mankind, including of course, our own countrymen as part of mankind, but also involving possible disloyalty to the particular institutions under which they and we, as a historical accident, happen to live. It will be a tragic conflict, as was that of the sixteenth century. Our age too will have its Mores and Fishers, its Latimers and Ridleys. We of the Ethical movement will do well not to delude ourselves with the hope that we can avert or bridge this clash of ideologies. What we can do is to understand it, and in the light of understanding to choose whom we will serve. If a unified world emerges from the struggle—a world in which loyalty to mankind will become as axiomatic as was loyalty to King and country in the days of our youth—one riddle which theology and metaphysics have vainly sought to answer will have been solved by human action.

(Contributed by Mr. Robertson)

THE MAKING OF A RATIONALIST

Originally published in *The Literary Guide* (January 1947): 6–7; (February 1947): 27; (March 1947): 46; (April 1947): 58; (May 1947): 81; (June 1947): 101.

[Editors: We have combined this series into one long testimonial in which Robertson shared his intellectual journey from a Tory Anglican to a materialist. While not going much into his Marxist politics, he helpfully relays some information about his Marxist journey there.]

My earliest recollections are of the old-world city of Durham, where I was born on October 7, 1886. My father, Archibald Robertson, was then Principal of Hatfield Hall in the university. He later became Principal of King's College, London, and eventually Bishop of Exeter. My mother's father, the Rev. C. N. Mann, was incumbent successively of two country parishes in Cornwall; so my early background was unimpeachably orthodox. There was, however, a religious division in my family. My paternal grandfather, the Rev. G. S. Robertson, after holding the living of Sywell, Northants, joined the Church of Rome, with the result that the younger of my father's brothers and sisters were educated as Catholics. Otherwise my antecedents are Tory and Anglican.

I was sent to a preparatory school near Bournemouth, kept by a cousin of my mother's, and later as a scholar to Winchester College. Before going to school I was taught the rudiments of Scriptural and English history and began Latin. My general progress at school was quick. I have always had a strong appetite for knowledge, which after all, when you come to think of it, is only vulgar curiosity canalized and given a nice name. I was especially interested in history. The version which I imbibed was extremely insular and one-sided, and, together with my religious instruction, had the effect of making me a pronounced jingo. England was always right and nearly always victorious. She also had the true religion. Manifestly, therefore, the best thing that could happen to the world was complete absorption in

the British Empire. In due course, under Providence, it would surely come to pass. I do not say that this was explicitly taught me; I only say that this is what my childish, but restless and logical, mind inferred from what *was* taught me. I have no reason to suppose that I was peculiar in that. Soon after I went to school the Jameson Raid took place. Everybody in my small world supported Jameson, and took for granted that it was entirely natural for an Englishman to make an armed raid into a foreign country in time of peace in order to see that Englishmen in that country had whatever they wanted. It simply did not occur to us that any other attitude was possible.

I was brought up at home and at school in the doctrines of the Church of England, without any specifically High, Low, or Broad tendencies. My reading of English history, supplemented by such books as Kingsley's *Westward Ho!* and Froude's *English Seamen in the Sixteenth Century*, made me definitely a Protestant. The religious division in my father's family was kept from me in childhood; and I thought of Roman Catholics as idolaters whose predecessors had lit the fires of Smithfield and whose ultimate salvation was a matter of conjecture. My father would certainly have discountenanced, had he known it, the violent opinion I formed of the religion of some who were near and dear to him. But I was never talkative, and did not tell him of the lengths to which my speculations went. I made a hero of the late John Kensit, and regarded him as a martyr when he died of injuries received in a brawl at Birkenhead.

I was not explicitly taught the doctrine of eternal torment, but I held it as a matter of course. The Bible was the word of God, and the Bible unquestionably teaches that the wicked and the unbelieving will be punished everlastingly.[36] It was so clearly set down that it did not occur to me to question it or to ask my parents if it was really true. They on their side were silent on the point. I gathered later that on this dogma they were more liberal than I had supposed.

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[36] Editors: In fact, scholars today challenge if this belief was actually held in the Bible. Most argue today that the notion of "eternal torment" is not to be found in the Bible and is the result of retrojecting later beliefs back onto the Bible and also a series of mistranslations.

Until my fifteenth year I never had the slightest doubt of the essential truth of all that I had been taught. I had heard from my parents themselves, in a very general and superficial way, of the Darwinian theory. They told me, in answer to my questions, that it could be reconciled with the first two chapters of Genesis by interpreting the latter as an allegory. In my first term at Winchester I accidentally picked up a cheap reprint of the R.P.A.[37] *Human Origins*, by Samuel Laing; and some time later Cassels' *Supernatural Religion*. But on each occasion I put down the book in horror when I discovered its infidel tendency! At the age of fourteen I was confirmed by Randall Davidson, afterwards Archbishop of Canterbury. I remember being worked up to a considerable pitch of religious fervour, and nursing an awful fear lest, when I made my first communion, I should, through insufficiency of devotion, "eat and rink damnation to myself" (1 Cor. 11:29)—words which I took in the most literal sense.

In 1901 I heard a sermon preached in the school chapel in which the view was taken that those phrases of the New Testament which referred to eternal punishment could be construed to mean merely temporal correction. I now think this an untenable interpretation. But at that time I jumped at it as a welcome removal of what had been a real moral stumbling-block in my creed. But for that sermon I doubt if I should ever have dared to think freely on any subject related to religion. I therefore reckon the occasion as a decisive moment in my mental history. The consequences of breaking down the barrier to freedom of thought were to be far-reaching.

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One day late in 1901, picking up an open book from a table in the school library, I became instantly interested in the subject matter. It was a history of the French Revolution. Well-written history has always attracted me; and I "fell" for the Revolution at once. I completely forgot what was. But it led me on to Carlyle, Lamartine,

[37] Editors: Rationalist Press Association.

Mignet, and Morse Stephens. I did not read them right through, but in a short time had perused considerable portions of them all.

The effect was electrifying. The Revolution became dramatically alive to me. Its leading figures, Mirabeau, Danton, Robespierre, Camille Desmoulins, Vergniaud, Madame Roland, Marat, Carnot, Barere, became as familiar as characters in Shakespeare. I lived with them; I could think of little else.

But more important than the epic thrill of the story was the realization, now for the first time explicit and conscious, that the ideals of my family and class were not the only ones for which men could live and die. Hitherto I had known of the Revolution only from insularly-written English histories. I had assumed, when I thought of the matter at all, that the Revolutionists were mere fiends who for no reason but pure devilment had beheaded their king and queen, worshipped the Goddess of Reason, and bathed in rivers of blood. Besides, they were enemies of England; and that was enough to condemn them. I now discovered that they were actuated by intelligible motives and possessed many fine qualities; that the Terror was the direct result of foreign invasion and a desperate military situation; and last, and not least, that the cause for which they were willing to sacrifice themselves and others was the right of the common man to a say in the control of his own destinies.

I became a democrat and a republican. What happened to me was equivalent to what old-fashioned religious circles call "conversion." I had found a new faith; and though I did not at first realize it, my old faith was melting away. You cannot suddenly discover that those whom you thought to be enemies of God and man are human beings, and rather fine fellows at that, without a considerable shock to your fundamental beliefs. The mere fact that I had learnt to share the ideals, and sympathize with the struggles, of men who were indifferent or hostile to Christianity prepared the way for a detached examination of the faith of my childhood. When I turned to examine it, it was dead.

One day in the autumn of 1902 I overheard a schoolfellow reading to a fireside group, with great amusement passages from

Shelley's notes to *Queen Mab*. Shelley, till then, had been only a name to me. From that moment he was one of my teachers. I found his works in the library and read *Queen Mab*, notes and all. I was taken by storm. Here were all my half-felt, half-suppressed doubts of Bible religion taken up and transformed into fierce denials. Even in childhood I had been shocked by Joshua's butcheries of men, women, and children, Samuel's hewing Agag in pieces, and David's torture of the Ammonites with saws and harrows and axes of iron. The conventional explanation that revelation is progressive, and that, in reading the Old Testament, allowance must be made for the savagery of the times, ignores the real difficulty, which is that the Bible depicts God as not only allowing, but *commanding*, murder and massacre. In my orthodox days I tried to believe that what would certainly now had somehow been right then; but this grew less and less easy. Shelley set my mind free.

About the same time I read Draper's *Conflict between Religion and Science*. Science has always interested me; but till then it had not occurred to me that there was such a conflict. I had heard of Galileo's forced recantation, but only as a case of the obscurantism of the Church of Rome. Draper revealed to me for the first time the continuous hostility to science of official Christianity, from the Fathers to the nineteenth century, and the martyrdoms of Hypatia, Servetus, Bruno, and Vanini at the hands of Christian orthodoxy.

Draper was a highly respectable Theist. But such a belief in God as I still possessed went down like a house of cards when I read the notes to *Queen Mab*. The questions cited by Shelley from Holbach's *System of Nature* rained like hammer-blows on the self-contradictions of popular religion. Irresistible, too, was Shelley's posing of the problem of evil:

> The same arguments which prove that God is the author of good, light, and life, prove him also to be the author of poison, darkness, and death. The wide wasting earthquake, the storm, the battle, and the tyranny, are attributable to this hypothetic being in the

same degree as the fairest forms of nature, sunshine, liberty, and peace.

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To many it will appear self-evident that I ought to have told my parents of my loss of faith and sought the benefit of their experience. But when I thought of this course, my courage failed. They had been aware of my absorption of revolutionary history and had taken a kindly interest in it; but I do not think they knew for a moment with what intensity I was carried away. And now the gulf that had opened was too wide. I felt that if I spoke I should be in an impossible dilemma. Either there would be failure to agree, pain and grief on both sides, and an end of happiness at home; or there would be an unreal discussion and an insincere acceptance on my part of explanations which did not convince me. I kept silence.

All the same, it was a near thing. At Winchester, in 1903, I committed the indiscretion of letting off steam in nine hundred lines of very bad verse, which came to the notice of the headmaster, Dr. Burge. He of course wrote to my father, who, as it happened, had just been appointed Bishop of Exeter. It was about the most inopportune time I could have chosen for such a *faux pas*! My father took the line that most boys caught what he called "the Shelley microbe" at some time or other, and that I had yet to learn that babes could ask questions which wise men could not answer. He quoted Aristotle's opinion on the unfitness of the young to study philosophy, and pointed to the obvious crudities and incoherences of my ill-timed effort. Being pressed for time, he then adjourned the discussion. It was never resumed. No doubt he took for granted that the "microbe" had worked itself out of my system. As for me, the longer I refrained from disclosing my real beliefs, the more impossible it became to disclose them. To those who censure my concealment I will only say that I have paid the price.

Politics now began to interest me intensely. I spoke a good deal in the school debating society, always on the Radical side and of

course in a hopeless minority. Those were the days of Liberal revival after the Boer War. I also followed up my Rationalist studies by reading T. H. Huxley's controversy with Wace in old copies of the *Nineteenth Century* and, Harnack's *What is Christianity?*, and dipped extensively into Renan's *Vie de Jesus* and his other volumes on Christian origins.

During my last months at Winchester I was converted to Socialism. Hitherto I had been vaguely attracted to it, but had not discovered any relation between its ideals and contemporary politics. One day in 1905, poking about among some books kept by the debating society for the assistance of would-be speakers, I came across *The Ethics of Socialism* by Ernest Belfort Bax—a collection of essays on ethical, political, and social topics from an approximately Marxist point of view. Bax was not a hundred per cent Marxist; but even semi-Marxism was then quite new to me. I learnt from him to view Socialism not as an arbitrary ideal out of relation to the world as it is, but as the last term in the march of history—the outcome of a cycle of economic, political, and ethical development which began with the birth of civilization and is still going on. Such a historical view just met my needs. I hastened to procure as many as I could of Bax's other works, notably those on the French Revolution, which I was now able to fit into a more general historical picture.

I made a few friends at school, and none who were able and willing to discuss seriously the subjects which engaged my attention. But in 1905 I went up to Trinity College, Oxford. A university, unlike a public school, does not attempt to mould character into one exclusive shape, but leaves it considerable freedom of self-expression. At Oxford I joined the Fabian Society, spoke occasionally at the Union (but never made my mark there), and read weekly and monthly periodicals of every shade of opinion. I made the acquaintance of *The Clarion*, which, under the editorship of Robert Blatchford, enjoyed at that time a considerable circulation, and also of *The Labour Leader*, *Justice*, and *The New Age*. At the same time I made conscientious efforts to learn something of the anti-Socialist case through Frederick Millar's *Socialism: Its Fallacies and Dangers*

and writings of W. H. Mallock. Millar did not impress me; but to Mallock I gave serious attention, though in the end I was unconvinced.

I continued from time to time to perpetrate verse of a sort and to inflict it on friends who cared to listen. One of them suggested that I should publish; but after one rejection I did nothing further, and have long since lost the MS. It was at that time that I invented the pseudonym "Robert Arch." The one real poet with whom I was ever acquainted, James Elroy Flecker, was in his last year at Oxford when I went up. On being shown one or two of my productions, he observed, no doubt with justice, that poetry needed a very long apprenticeship. I did not bind myself apprentice, and have no reason to suppose that I should have achieved much in that line if I had.

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In 1907 I began reading for Greats, and therefore had to get to grips with philosophy. Since I first discarded dogmatic religion, I had been attracted by scientific Materialism. The stumbling-block in the way of Materialism is the difficulty in conceiving how the interplay of dead, unconscious particles can have given rise to life and consciousness. This difficulty cannot be got over by pure logic. In practice, we know that dead matter "comes alive" every time we absorb food into our systems, and that unconsciousness gives rise to consciousness every time we wake up in the morning. But we do not know how; and the critics of Materialism make the most of that fact.

My acquaintance with the writings of Belfort Bax showed me that Materialism was not the only philosophy possible to a Rationalist. His *Roots of Reality*, which appeared in 1907, helped me towards an understanding of the Idealist position, though it was not until I read Kant that I really grasped its basis. According to Idealists of the school of Kant and Hegel "consciousness in general" (but not this or that individual mind) is the foundation of all things, material as well as mental. Another book which influenced me at this time was Paulsen's *Introduction to Philosophy*, one of those recommended by

my Greats tutor, H. A. Prichard. From Paulsen I adopted the suggestion of panpsychism—the view that every material particle is only the external aspect of something mental (the "monads" of Leibnitz or the "mind-stuff" of W. K. Clifford).

This seemed to answer the difficulty about dead matter coming alive. The weakness of the solution is that it leaves the real problem—that of the emergence of the actual human mind from separate "monads," whatever their nature may be—exactly where it was before. It took me twenty-five years to recognize this answer for the verbalism which it is.

At Oxford the Idealists were being attacked on more than one front. The Pragmatism of James and Schiller was much talked about. James himself visited Oxford at this time and delivered a course of lectures afterwards published in his book, *A Pluralistic Universe*. It was at these lectures that I first heard the name of Bergson. Meanwhile, Cook Wilson, with Prichard as lieutenant, was advocating Realism. But all varieties of Oxford philosophy shared a common conservative and religious bias. The main enemy to be slaughtered was Utilitarianism. We were given John Stuart Mill's work on the subject to read and refute, and were then supposed to have done with it. Herbet Spencer's *Man Versus the State* was studied as a serious contribution to political philosophy; his other works were not read at all even for the purpose of refutation. No one had ever heard of Marx or Engels, save as superannuated revolutionists whom only the uneducated took seriously.

Those few undergraduates who thirsted for heterodoxy sought it outside the official curriculum. Trystan Edwards started a Nietzsche Society, to which Frederick Leith-Ross (later of the Treasury) and a few others belonged, including myself. Nietzscheans and anti-Nietzscheans were both admitted, the only common bond being an interest in the subject. I read through at this time, in English translations (being unhandy at German), quite a number of Nietzsche's works, including *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, *Beyond Good and Evil*, *A Genealogy of Morals*, and *Antichrist*. I never became his disciple. I could not admire the ideal of the superman; and Nietzsche's

many self-contradictions leapt to the eye. But I enjoyed his aphorisms and was interested in his queer, inverted mysticism.

At this period, too, I became a life-long admirer of Shaw. I read all his plays and prefaces which had already appeared, and went to any of the plays which were performed at Oxford. I remember in particular seeing Ellen Terry in *Captain Brassbound's Conversion*. I am not certain that Shaw taught me anything new; usually I had already been persuaded by others of the truth, so far as it was true, of what he said. But he delighted me by putting my often ill-defined thoughts and feelings into his own clear, crisp, provocative, and sometimes eloquent language. If I were asked to select from Shaw's works the passage which more than any other enshrines his central message, I should choose this from the preface to *Man and Superman*:

> This is the true joy in life, the being used for a purpose recognized by yourself as a might one; the being thoroughly worn out before you are thrown on the scrap-heap; the being a force of Nature instead of a feverish, selfish little clod of ailments and grievances complaining that the world will not devote itself to making you happy. And also the only real tragedy in life is the being used by personally minded men for purposes which you recognize to be base.

It is a great message. But it is not enough. As Shaw's latter vagaries proved, it points indifferently to either Communism or Fascism. Merely to admire a purpose as mighty is useless unless you have some standard by which to tell whether it is mighty for good or for evil.

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I took my degree in 1909 and in 1910 entered the Admiralty as a first division clerk, not from any fervent wish to serve the State, but because the Civil Service afforded security and at the same time seemed likely, from what I had heard of it, to leave me leisure and

opportunity to follow up my real interests in life. Open political activity was impossible. But I worked in the Socialist movement as far as I could, and made many friends in it, including Mrs. Bridges Adams, J. F. Green, Rosalind Travers (later the second wife of H. M. Hyndman), and, after some years, Hyndman himself. I was also attracted by Belloc and Chesterton's exposure of the party system, and became a regular reader of *The New Witness* until its anti-Semitism disgusted me beyond endurance. At the same time I became a reader and admirer of Anatole France. I well remember buying *Les Dieux Ont Soif* at a Paris bookstall during a holiday abroad. My early "soaking" in the French Revolution enabled me to appreciate fully the accuracy, impartiality, and artistic sympathy with which France treats the subject. The idealism, devotion, illusions, and cruelty of the Revolution are portrayed without extenuation and without malice. From that day I numbered Anatole France among my masters.

I married in 1914. Soon afterwards the world crashed about our ears in the Four Years' War. The question of volunteering did not arise in view of my position at the Admiralty. My work there absorbed nearly all my energies. For the present I expended what was left in an effort to grasp the hang of things. During the years since leaving Oxford I had hardly given a thought to philosophy. I now took it up again. Not for a moment did I revise my attitude to the faith of my childhood. *That* was gone, never to return. But I set myself seriously to reason on the nature of the inner and outer world, and from that day to this I have never left off.

I was still a long way from Marxism. But if insistence on the priority of visible and tangible goods like hearth and home, food and fellowship, peace and comfort, to mere abstractions like country, prestige, greatness, or empire is Materialism, I was a Materialist. The idolatry of abstractions, it seemed to me, pervaded our whole philosophy of life, and in particular the whole of established religion. I started writing in this sense for *The Freethinker* over the signature "Robert Arch." Except for one or two earlier letters to the Press, this was the beginning of my appearances under that pen-name. I chose pseudonymity I the first place for family reasons; but it had other

advantages. When I began tow rite for Socialist papers my pen-name enabled me for some years to express myself on political issues without incurring official censure.

I have only pleasant memories of my relations with Mr. Chapman Cohen during the years I wrote for him. *The Freethinker* is sometimes reproached with vulgarity. As regards the editorials and signed contributions the charge is quite untrue. If I were to make any criticism it would be that too many contributions tend to ponderosity, and that the paper seems to collect an undue ration of mere cranks. Anyway, it afforded me a platform. Soon after beginning to write for it I joined the N.S.S.,[38] to which I still belong and for which I still speak.

A change in my official work increased the amount of time I could devote to writing. I was put on a "watch," working alternately by day and night. Each watch lasted twelve hours; and as night watches were usually pretty quiet one could read a good deal and do a certain amount of writing between watches. During the war of 1914–1918[39] I wrote assiduously for *Justice* and *The Freethinker*, read such philosophers as Kant, Schopenhauer, and Bergson, and got my ideas into a sort of order. It was at that time that I conceived the notion of putting my views on philosophy into book form—the first germ of *Whence, Whither, and Why?* I had written several thousand words by 1918, but put the MS. aside owing to pressure of other work, and did not finish it till 1926.

In 1919, at the Hyndmans', I met Belfort Bax—the man who had made me a Socialist fourteen years before. We became friends; and it was he who led me to the R.P.A., which I joined in 1920 and served as a director from 1925 to 1932. I knew Bax well till his death, in 1926, and did a little (all too little) to preserve his memory from oblivion by a pamphlet entitled *Ernest Belfort Bax: Thinker and Pioneer*, published by the Hyndman Literary Committee. It was my misfortune to meet him too late, when his powers were failing. As a historian, he showed that the historic sense was not a monopoly of

[38] Editors: National Secular Society.
[39] Editors: World War I.

reactionaries. As a philosopher, he anticipated Bergson, Shaw, and Wells. As a social critic, he predicted Bolshevism thirty years before it came. He taught me the meaning of philosophy, and did more than any other one man to make me what I am.

* * * * *

From 1920 onward I began to write frequently for *The Literary Guide*. My chief interest at the time, outside politics, was philosophy. I had begun by calling myself a Materialist, using the name more as a flag of battle than in any clear-cut sense. I temporarily abandoned the label on finding that to many Rationalists Materialism meant a belief in the possibility of explaining life and mind in terms of mechanism, and that anyone questioning the possibility was instantly suspected of having some theological axe to grind. I proceeded to "trail my coat," and often got into hot water in consequence. These metaphysical battles, if not very profitable, afforded me a good deal of fun and made me, at all events, one friend in the camp of the mechanists. This was W. H. Massey, who in 1921 took pity on my ignorance and for many years strove to reclaim me from what he good-humouredly regarded the uncertified lunacy of Idealism. Of his merits as a host, conversationalist, and exposer of Spiritualist claims those who knew him have no need to be told, and those who did not can form no conception.

As time went on, my interest shifted from these severely theoretical topics to others of more living moment. The average man and woman cannot be expected to take much interest in propaganda based wholly on theoretical and historical grounds to the exclusion of the practical issues of everyday life. For this reason I have always deprecated the concentration of so much Rationalist polemic on the question of the historicity of Jesus. The problem as presented, for example, by J. M. Robertson and P. L. Couchoud undoubtedly makes a fascinating puzzle. But the myth theory is not essential to Rationalism, and should not be allowed to erect itself into a new orthodoxy on the ruins of the old. It is time we all cultivated a sense

of proportion in this absurdly overheated controversy. Theoretical and historical criticism are important; but it is more important to appeal to the man in the street at points where the shoe pinches.

In 1931 my father died. My mother had predeceased him by five years. I took an early opportunity of shedding my pen-name. Only those who have worn a mask as long as I did can know the relief it was to drop it. I was also now in a position to resign from the Civil Service. Since then I have been able to write as I please. But I won my freedom late, and in a world which was already sliding downhill into a second World War. The German elections of 1930, when the Nazis for the first time polled 5,000,000 votes, were to many thousands of thinking folk like a roll of distant thunder. Another thing that impressed me at this time was the growing success of Soviet Russia. For thirteen years the Press had dinned into our ears the immanent collapse of Bolshevism. I had taken its failure for granted. Now all of a sudden this crazy, this inefficient, this bankrupt system began to be depicted as a deadly menace to our trade, our prosperity, and our civilization! Something was wrong somewhere. I decided to visit the Soviet Union; but that is another story.

At the same time I finally settled accounts with Idealist philosophy. It was not a Marxist work which finally laid that ghost, but F. R. Tennant's *Philosophy of the Sciences*, which I read in 1932. I had accepted Idealism because I believed that such a philosophy alone could guarantee the certainty of scientific knowledge. Tennant shows that such a belief rests on a mistaken notion of certainty, and that the certitude which we attach to scientific knowledge, and indeed to the ordinary knowledge of every day life, is really pragmatic. Later on I read Lenin's *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism*, which left me in no further doubt. In 1933 I wrote a philosophical dialogue under the title *Philosophers on Holiday*, in which orthodox academic philosophers are made to do battle with Dialectical Materialism to the advantage of the latter. That represents my position to-day.

In the second World War, being now well over fifty, I did a certain amount of A.R.P. service, but was left with sufficient leisure for further writing. A re-reading of Gibbon led me back to the

problem of Christian origins. I wrote two or three short articles and showed them to a friend, who pressed me to expand them into a book. The result was *The Bible and Its Background*, published by the R.P.A. in 1942. It was my first success by the tangible standard of circulation. With its publication my "making" as a Rationalist may be said to have been complete.

I cannot end these reminiscences without recording my debt to the Board of the R.P.A., and especially to the late and present editors of *The Literary Guide*, for the encouragement and forbearance which they have extended to me throughout our association. People who know nothing about it have got into the way of calling the R.P.A. Victorian and out of date. My worst enemy has never called me Victorian. It is a sufficient vindication of the modernity of the R.P.A. that it should have published works by such author as V. Gordon Childe, J. B. S. Haldane, Julian Huxley, and H. Levy (to name no others) at a price which perhaps no other firm could have afforded. The concern inspired in the defenders of the faith by those "cheap scientific books written on atheistic principles" tells its own tale. Long may the stream continue!

THE BIRTH CERTIFICATE OF DEMOCRACY

Originally published in *The Daily Worker* (1 October 1947): 2

Three hundred years ago this month there waws published a document which may be described as the birth certificate of British democracy.

The Civil War had ended in the victory of Parliament, that is to say the rising capitalist class over Charles I and the feudal aristocracy. But Parliament had been able to win only by arming and drilling the common people.

Its war aims were very simple—the seizure of political power from the king and aristocracy, and Parliamentary control of the armed forces and the Church.

But the yeoman farmers and small traders who manned Cromwell's army were out for something better. They wanted no more kings or lords over them, no Church to tell them what to think, but a people's State and freedom for the common man.

The soldiers elected two "agitators" from each regiment to look after their interests, and told Cromwell that if he did not lead them they would act without him.

A Council of the Army was set up, consisting of the ordinary council of war, with the addition of two officers and two men from each regiment.

Cromwell and his officers, after the army had moved on London, tried to effect an agreement with the king behind the backs of the solders.

In October 1647, impatient of the delay and suspicious of treachery, the soldiers of five regiments, aided by "freeborn" John Lilburne, drew up a programme called "The Agreement of the People" and requested the Council of the Army to recommend it to the nation.

This programme provided for manhood suffrage (known Cavaliers alone being disfranchised), equal electoral districts,

elections every two years, the abolition of the king's and Lord's vetoes, absolute freedom of conscience, freedom from impressment, and equality before the law.

A dramatic debate took place in Putney Church between Cromwell and his "grandees" on the one hand and the Levellers on the other.

"I would fain know," said brave Thomas Rainborough, "what other soldier hath fought for all this while? I think that the poorest he that is in England hath a life to live as well as the greatest he."

Cromwell's officers outvoted the "agitators" in the Council; and the Levellers, though they gave Cromwell uneasy nights for many years, were finally crushed. But they were never forgotten.

Archibald Robertson.

FRENCH COMMUNISTS

Originally published in *The New Statesman and Nation* 33, no. 839 (1947): 236

Sir,—Mr. Koestler's memory may be good; but he forgets that that great patriot, M. Bonnet, told the German Ambassador months before the war broke out that he intended, when it did, to suppress the Communist Party. He also forgets that *l'Humanité* was suppressed a week before the outbreak of the war.

It may be wrong not to bang the patriotic drum when your paper is banned and you are going to be imprisoned anyway; but it is not unintelligible.

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DIALECTICAL MATERIALISM

Originally published in *The Monthly Record* 53, no. 3 (1948): 3–5

Materialist philosophy begins with the criticism of religion.

From the dawn of civilization we have been trained to believe in two different worlds—first, in the natural or material world, which we get to know by our own senses and by reflection on the information they convey to us; secondly, in the supernatural or spiritual world, of which our senses tell us nothing, but of which we learn on the authority of persons claiming to be in possession of a revelation about it. The first materialists were men who challenged the truth of such claims. The question is not purely theoretical, but extremely practical. For from the dawn of civilization priesthoods and churches have based their title to public support on their claims to supernatural knowledge, and the exploitation of man by, man has been justified on the grounds which depend on the existence of such knowledge, e.g., the existence of God, a revelation made by God to men, the immortality of the soul, and the dependence of our eternal happiness on submission to the revealed will of God. By denying revelation materialism challenges the right to live of those classes which profit by it. The issue, therefore, between religion and materialism has never been merely academic, but fundamentally economic and social.

The first great challenge of materialism to religion in modern times was in; the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and coincided with the first great conquests of natural science. Observation and experiment had, established the reign of law in fields which the Church represented as continually subject to; divine intervention. As the Church was convicted of error on important issues, men asked why they should submit to its authority on any: Why suppose that there is a God and an immortal soul simply because priests say so? Why not make probability the criterion of belief, and utility that of conduct?

But the early conquests of science were chiefly in the field of mechanics. This led to a twofold weakness in early materialism. It tried io explain social phenomena by physical causes (as when Holbach attributed wars to "too much bitterness in a fanatic's bile" or "the bad digestion of a monarch's stomach"); and it laid itself open to a specious counter-attack by the religious. What, after all, asked Berkeley, did we know of the material world except from our ideas? And must not, ideas be id a mind? Mind therefore was logically prior to matter; and since none of us created the world, there must be another mind—God—who did. Thus philosophic idealism became a weapon in the hands of theology, and even scientists, in many cases did lip-service to it by assuming a Creator to start the world-process.

Since those days science has extended its conquests to the phenomena of life and society. As a result modern materialism is able to meet the idealist objections. This has been done by philosophers who are not Marxists (e.g., Santayana and Sellers); but Marx and Engels can fairly claim to have been the first to answer the idealists. In his *Theses on Feuerbach* (jotted down in a note-book in 1845 and published by Engels in 1888) Marx points out that man is not a passive recipient of sensations. He acts on the world and changes it, and by doing so successfully proves the truth of the ideas on which he acts. This is the only test of truth. Ideas which cannot be tested in action, e.g., those of the supernatural, are fantasies evolved by man to compensate him for secular frustration. As Marx elsewhere puts it, they are "the opium of the people."[40]

It follows that there are no eternal truths. Dialectical materialism does not deny objective truth; to say it does is to travesty it. But truth, justice and all other ideas have been evolved in the course of time as aids to man in his struggle for life. They are therefore relative and not absolute. Marx welcomed Darwin's *Origin of Species* as a valuable support to his basic position.

It further follows that all our ideas are experimental and subject to correction. Nothing can be more false than to regard,

[40] Editors: This is from Marx's *A Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right*, intro.

Marxism as a rigid body of dogma. It is curious that the same people who condemn Marxism as dogmatic also condemn the Soviets for opportunism when they correct their policy in the light of events! But such correction is of the essence of Marxism as of all scientific thinking. All scientific laws are approximations, e.g., those of mechanics: bodies do not really fall with a constant acceleration; for as they fall, their distance from the centre of the earth diminishes and the force of gravity increases. Similarly for Marx the classical labour theory of value is a first approximation, which he modifies in *Capital* as he goes along. Hence science is not afraid of contradictions. Two contradictory ideas may both be necessary; and we may use them, provided we remember that they are tools and do not pretend that either is absolute truth. This has been strikingly vindicated in the recent history of physics, when it has been found necessary to describe material particles for some purposes as particles and for other purposes as waves.

Dialectical, materialism provides the answer to the religious taunt that we cannot explain ideas in terms of physics and chemistry. Why should we? Our thinking powers were not evolved to explain everything, but as aids in the battle of life. To cope with our physical environment we use one set of intellectual tools; to cope with our social environment, another. Neither set is a master-key to the universe. The world evolves: physical processes give rise to vital, and vital to mental and social; and to cope with each we use different concepts. But it is all one world; and there is no need to go outside it to explain its ways.

In its special application to human history dialectical materialism starts with the fact that, as Engels puts it, "mankind must first of all eat and drink, have shelter and clothing, before it can pursue politics, science, religion, art, etc."[41] Consequently the politics, science, religion and art of a society, are coloured and biased by the necessity impelling its members to win a living. The capitalist system is doomed, not because it conflicts with abstract justice, but

[41] Editors: This quote is from Friedrich Engels' "Speech at the Grave of Karl Marx" 1883. This was published in *Der Sozialdemokrat* (22 March 1883).

because its inherent nature forces it to destroy its own market by cutting its costs and then to seek new markets by war. To end such a system with minimum cost is our primary interest. To any who fret in this time of crisis about the “political and intellectual freedom” of its beneficiaries and champions, my short answer as a Marxist is, “First things first.”

THE COLD WAR

Originally in *The New Statesman and Nation* 35, no. 879 (1948): 30–31

Sir,—There is one consequence of the invention of the atomic bomb which, so far as I know, has not been pointed out. Hitherto it has always been assumed that the cruellest of all wars is civil war. So long as war was fought with weapons that dealt destruction only to individuals or small bodies of combatants, that was no doubt true. But with the advent of weapons of mass destruction the reverse is the case. No side in a civil war can afford to use atomic bombs or bacteria, for the simple season that it would thereby deal mass destruction to its partisans as well as its enemies—not to mention the country which it aspires to control. But in a foreign war, where everyone on the other side of no man's land is presumed to be an enemy, no such scruples need deter the belligerents.

It follows that of all probable wars civil war is now the least destructive. It is, therefore, preferable (given the two evils) to foreign war. And, of course, civil struggles stopping short of war are preferable to any war at all.

This has a bearing on the famous Marxist alternative, to which Critic drew attention in your issue of December 20. If the class struggle between capitalist and worker is allowed to degenerate into an atomic war between the U.S.A. and the U.S.S.R. with their respective allies, the "common ruin of the contending classes" is, as Critic says, a possible and even probable outcome. In order that the struggle may not take this form, it seems to me vital that the line of division should run as far as possible across frontiers and not along them.

If this is once admitted, it follows that those who strive to accentuate the class struggle in the capitalist world are, in effect, working to minimise the destructiveness of the present world conflict, while those who think on nationalist lines are in effect sabotaging civilisation.

Some will ask why we cannot have both social and international peace. That is not "reality-thinking." The question is natural enough to those whom the capitalist system has treated well. It has not treated well the greater part of the race; and it is idle to ask them to submit to exploitation with a good grace.

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CZECHOSLOVAKIA

Originally published in *The New Statesman and Nation* 35, no. 888 (1948): 215.

Sir,—The present unholy fuss over Czechoslovakia seems to boil down to two allegations: (1) that it is a case of Russian aggression, in every respect similar to German aggression in 1938–1939; (2) that the Czech Communists have "swallowed," "liquidated" or otherwise undesirably disposed of the Czech Social Democrats.

As to (1), I am glad to see in your leading article that you repudiate this tosh. In 1938, after a lot of raucous speeches by Hitler, Czechoslovakia was invaded and dismembered, and in 1939 swallowed whole by the Nazi Reich. In 1948, so far as I have read, not one Russian soldier or plane has moved into Czechoslovakia, and not one Soviet leader has opened his mouth on the subject.

But, say the objectors, Russia has no need to use military force. The work is done for her by indigenous Communists, whom a comic gentleman on the B.B.C. last week described as "traitors in the pay of the enemy." It might do this gentleman and others good to cogitate by what process traitors in enemy pay have succeeded in any country at all, let alone in intelligent Czechoslovakia, in becoming the biggest political party and in "swallowing" other parties.

That brings me to (2). I write as an old revolutionary Socialist who learnt the fundamentals of Socialism from the grand old men of Social Democracy before 1914. In those far-off days it was possible for Right and Left Socialists to co-operate in one party without subjection to interrogatories as to whether we believed in parliamentary or dictatorial tactics, in physical or moral force. (Many in fact believed in both.) It is often supposed that this happy state of things was terminated by the Russian Revolution. As a matter of fact it was terminated by the outbreak of war in 1914, when the Socialist movement split from top to bottom on the issue of collaboration with capitalist war-makers. It will not be denied that the resultant schism, which in due course crystallised into that between Social Democrats

and Communists, is the worst thing that has happened to the movement in this century.

Anyone who desires the victory of Socialism in our time must surely desire first and foremost the reparation of the 1914 schism and the restoration of working class unity on a basis which will prevent its repetition. Yet, whenever Communists and Social Democrats come together, our little-minded pundits raise a howl that the former are "swallowing" the latter. I have never witnessed the process of a Communist swallowing a Social Democrat, and do not know what it is supposed to be like. But I suspect that the fear behind the fudge is something like this: "These Communists are made of sterner stuff than we. They have made their politics into a religion, which we have not. They are at it seven days a week, which we are not. If we get together, therefore, there is a dreadful danger that their policy will get adopted. Anything but that—even the postponement of Socialism, even a third world war, rather than the achievement of Socialism by other means than the constitutional business of first, second and third readings in two Houses to which we are accustomed!"

This fear, which was behind the betrayals of 1914, 1926 and 1931, evidently still walks. But what sort of Socialists are those whom it actuates?

Archibald Robertson

DEMOCRACY AND SOCIALISM (1)

Originally published in *The New Statesman and Nation* 35, no. 890 (1948): 255

Sir,—Mr. Tom Sargant says that his "main goal is the achievement of a just society in which men behave to each other like members of a family." So is mine. Where we differ is that he apparaently thinks that that state of affairs can be brought about by treating as members of the family, here and now, people like Tories, Fascists, and "rugged individualists" who despise and reject his ideal, whereas I regard such people as enemies to be fought and beaten how we can, where we can, when we can.

Et ego in Arcadia vixi. I too was once a Social Democrat, believing that Socialism could be won with kid gloves and without tears. My eyes were opened in 1931, when the "bankers' ramp" threw a spanner into the works of Parliamentary democracy and showed how the capitalists dealt even with such a meek and mild Labour Government as Ramsay MacDonald's. The process has been repeated since 1945, with the difference that they now find it unnecessary to even turn out the Labour Government. It eats out of their hand.

I am glad Mr. Sargant has the grace to recognise that it is the "stupid fault" of Social Democrats that Communists are the way they are. I wish him well, naturally, in his enterprise of building a Socialist Society on his "values." But I am afraid Wall Street won't let him. They believe in rugged individualism over in America; and the Marshall Plan has strings to it. Socialism can be built only by hard fighting. And, in case Mr. Sargant says I am just a Moscow gramophone, let me remind him that our difference is far older than 1917. In every revolution there is a Gironde and a Mountain; and it is always the Gironde, the Liberals, the Third Force that get squeezed out, and the Mountain that wins through and does the job. So it was in 1793, so it was in 1917, so it is in Eastern Europe now, and so it always will be until the world is changed.

DEMOCRACY AND SOCIALISM (2)

Originally published in *The New Statesman and Nation* 35, no. 892 (1948): 295

Sir,—Mr. Brenan may make his mind easy. The history of the French Revolution has already been written and re-written from a working-class point of view—from the works of Bax and Kropotkin down to the volume of the French C.P. published in 1939. It needs no re-doing, save so far as a great story is always worth re-telling.

Of course, the Mountain fell in 1794, but not until it had done its job of saving France from invasion and dismemberment, which the Gironde had muffed. The fall of the Mountain has a moral for us, but not the one Mr. Brenan would draw. It fell because it had kept bourgeoisie in being and served the cause of its own destroyers.

Neither the Russians nor the East European popular fronts to-day have made that mistake. There will be no Thermidor this time.

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THE GODS ARE ATHIRST

Originally published in *The New Statesman and Nation* 35, no. 894 (1948): 335

Sir,—In your article under the above heading you begin unexceptionably by quoting what I said. You proceed to offer a paraphrase: "fanatics always win and therefore the rest of us should abandon reason, tolerance and common sense." This you invite me to repudiate as bad history, bad Marxism and bad morality.

Or course I repudiate it. But I never said it. If to select an end and stick to it is to be a fanatic, then I am one and certainly prefer such fanaticism to the opportunism and careerism that characterises most politicians. But this does not commit me to the abandonment of reason, tolerance and common sense. I use such reason and common sense as I have to adapt available means to the Socialist end, and I tolerate those who co-operate in its achievement. I can conceive no reason why I should tolerate those who thwart it.

History, of course, can prove anything provided it is cut into the right lengths. By stopping short at the Edict of Nantes you can prove that the Third Force won after the French wars of religion. By continuing to Richelieu, Louis XIV and the revocation of the Edict I could prove that the Third Force lost and that fact made the French Revolution necessary.

Similarly the French Revolution can be made to prove one thing if we stop in 1793, another if we stop in 1794, and yet another if we regard it as a process still unfinished, and 1848, 1871 and 1917 as its legitimate continuation—as I do myself.

The view that the French Revolution, owing to the Mountain's bump of destruction, accomplished its task at infinitely greater cost than was really necessary is, of course, the stock view of Liberal writers from Macaulay on; but I am surprised that you should even incidentally label it Marxist. Marx. Who calls Danton "the greatest

master of revolutionary policy yet known"[42] and recognises in Marat and Babeuf his own legitimate forerunners, can hardly be cited as a witness for the Liberal thesis. On the contrary, Marx insists (and the same point is made by the anti-Marxist Kropotkin) that, even to carry through a middle-class revolution, the working class has to be mobilised and set to fight "the enemies of their enemies," as did the Levellers in the English Revolution and the *Enragés* in the French.

To cut the past and come to the present, you express a wish that Moscow would "seek co-operation with Western Socialists who also desire world Socialism." If by Western Socialists you mean Western Social Democratic leaders, I reply by asking you when, from 1945 on, those leaders have shown the slightest desire to co-operate with Moscow or anyone else in achieving world Socialism? One of the first things the Labour Government did was to protest to Czechoslovakia (before there was any question of a Communist "coup" there) against the nationalisation of industries in that country. Another was to continue without a break the Churchill policy of royalist intervention in Greece. It may be that our foreign policy is decided by the need of dollars—thought I think there is more to it than that. Be that as it may, how can Moscow be asked to co-operate with it? How can any self-respecting Socialist, Western or Eastern, bring himself to co-operate with it?

I do not say that Moscow is never mistaken. I *do* say that a professing Socialist who fights Socialism in those countries where is has won power, and by so doing helps capitalism to save itself in those countries where it still retains power, *must* be mistaken. If to say that is called "blindly following the lead of Moscow," well—no doubt the English language needs revision! But I am an old Socialist, and know my friends from my foes, and can afford to laugh at the misdirected sneer.

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[42] Editors: This was not actually Marx who said this but Engels in the *Revolution and Counter-Revolution in Germany* (pub. 1851–1852 in serialized form in the *New York Daily Tribune*). Engels wrote this at Marx's request, as he was busy at work on other materials. The final works bore Marx's name because of this.

DEMOCRACY AND SOCIALISM (3)

Originally published in *The New Statesman and Nation* 35, no. 896 (1948): 376

Sir,—Mr. Dodgson scores an easy point by putting into my mouth words I did not use. I said I tolerated those who co-operated in achieving the Socialist end. This is very different from tolerating "only those people and views with which I agree." There are probably man people and views in the Communist Party and among Left Social Democrats all over the world with which I disagree; but I sink such disagreement in a common cause.

I added that I could conceive no reason for tolerating those who thwarted the Socialist end. At a time when Socialism alone can save humanity from horrible destruction, to tolerate the enemies of Socialism to any extent not imposed by expediency seems to me just silly. I thought so long ago when I was a Social Democrat. I have not changed my opinion since.

As to Mr. Dodgson's second point, obviously new circumstances require adaptation of new *means* to ends. To recognise that is the essence of Marxism. But if I were to modify the Socialist *end*, I would cease to call myself a Socialist. Above all, I should refrain from excommunicating as bad Socialists men who had the guts to stick to their guns while I ran away.

Archibald Robertson

SOVIET TACTICS AND SOCIALISM (1)

Originally published in *The New Statesman and Nation* 36, no. 919 (1948): 328

Sir,—Why all this fuss in your columns about world revolution? No instructed person is ignorant that Marxists (and therefore the Soviet leaders) believe in the overthrow of capitalism by the workers of the world. No one is surprised that capitalists (and therefore the American Government and the Tory party) object to that proceeding. The anomalous thing is that Socialists should object. This only shows how Social Democracy has degenerated in the last fifty years. It would be funny if it were not tragic.

When I became a Socialist in my teens, world revolution was a commonplace of the Socialist movement. We used to sing Bruce Glasier's "When the revolution comes" and Jim Connell's "The people's flag is deepest red." Some of us (more in America than here) used to sign our letters "Yours for the Revolution." All this did not prevent us calling ourselves Social Democrats. For in those days Social Democracy meant what it had meant to Bronterre O'Brien (author of the phrase) namely, a democracy that was social, not merely political. To-day it seems to mean a Socialism that takes care to do nothing without the parliamentary forms evolved in capitalist States. It is a change of emphasis which amounts to a change of meaning.

Fabianism, which wrought the change, did the cause of Socialism both a service and a disservice. In forcing Socialists to master the machinery of administration, it did good. But in inducing the belief that capitalism could be converted into Socialism by constitutional means alone and without a revolutionary class struggle, Fabianism did untold evil. It left the movement helpless against the catastrophe of world war, twice repeated in our generation; and now we see the saddening spectacle of Fabians lending their active support to war preparations on the side of capitalist America against those

Governments which (whatever their mistakes) at least spring from and work for the global class struggle of toilers against exploiters.

Precisely because Marxists believe in world revolution, they do *not* believe in world war, which is the surest way of sabotaging revolution. That is the answer to Mr. George Dallas and his kind. If we had had in Britain the sort of Government for which we voted in 1945—a real Socialist Government—we should have lined up with world Socialism and not with world capitalism. We should have met the American blackmail of terminating Lease-Lend by promptly telling Truman to take over our military responsibilities in Europe and the Middle East. (If there weren't enough G.I.s, there would have been the Red Army to take over!) We should have concluded trade agreements with the Socialist governments of the world, rebuilt our economy on that basis, and *dared* Truman to atom-bomb London in retaliation. He wouldn't have dared. There was then just enough decency, even in America, to stop that.

As it is, our Labour leaders have sold out to Wall Street, and it looks as if only the French working class, and those of our own who may yet catch something of their genuine Jacobin spirit, now stand between civilisation and hell.

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SOVIET TACTICS AND SOCIALISM (2)

Originally published in *The New Statesman and Nation* 36, no. 921 (1948): 373

Sir,—I may be, as Mr. Waldegrave says, an incurable romantic, and I may be peculiar in having taken seriously the Socialism of the pioneering days of my youth. The latter imputation I take as a compliment.

But the considerations which lead to my present attitude are realistic and the product of living and learning. They are, firstly, that capitalist statecraft has twice plunged us into the horror of a world war. It was permissible to think World War I was an accident. But World War II proved that the thing was becoming a habit, and the glib way in which responsible people are now talking of World War III suggests that capitalism in its dotage is becoming maniacally homicidal.

Secondly, experience shows that the only way out of the capitalist impasse is by the direct, revolutionary action of the workers. As a bourgeois intellectual, I wish it were not so; but "facts are chiels that winna' ding."[43] I have seen the bankers' ramp of '31 destroy one Labour Government; I have seen the crack of the Wall Street whip hamstring another. Wherever Socialism has won through, it has been by revolution.

Thirdly, world revolution has the advantage over world war, that you cannot wage it (or resist it) with atom bombs or bacteria, because if you do you massacre your own side as well as the other. As the present urgent danger is atomic and bacterial world war, I naturally prefer world revolution—not for romantic reasons, but on grounds realistic and selfish enough to satisfy even Mr. Waldegrave. Whether revolution would amount to civil war depends on the alignment of forces in different countries. In some (I hope in England) a mere show of force in the shape of a general strike might be enough.

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[43] Editors: A quotation from Robert Burns' poem "A Dream," which essentially means that facts are things which cannot be overturned.

But even civil war could not be so “horrible beyond imagination” as the afflictions with which the thuggish defenders of “Christian civilisation” at this moment threaten mankind.

MARXISM, PAST AND PRESENT

Originally published in *The Plain View* 4, no. 1 (1949): 56–57

In your article under the above title in the January issue, while preserving a judicial balance for the most part, you tip the scale against Marxists by throwing in some assertions which seem to be demonstrably untrue. Near the beginning you say that Marxists "reckon against them all who are not wholly with them." Anyone who does this is a very bad Marxist, and would be "told off" by the Party for this sectarian attitude. Marx condemned it in advance. In the *Communist Manifesto* he disclaims founding "a party opposed to other working class parties." In the *Critique of the Gotha Programme* he ridicules the notion that all classes except the working-class (e.g., the professional class, shopkeepers, or peasants) are "one reactionary mass." Lenin in *Left Wing Communism: An Infantile Disorder*, insists on the duty of Communists to "live in harmony" with "small commodity producers" who "can not be driven out or crushed," but *can* be "remoulded and re-educated… by very prolonged, slow, cautious organisational work"; on the necessity of building Socialism "with the material bequeathed us by capitalism"; on the obligation of Communists not to "fence themselves off" by slogans, but to "talk to the people, not in scientific language… but everywhere to rouse the thoughts of the masses and draw them into the struggle." Stalin, in the speech *Dizzy with Success*, rebuked his own hotheads and insisted on the importance of winning the support of the majority of Russian peasants. How unlike all this is to the vulgar caricature of the Communist as a conspirator with a knife between his teeth, plotting to stab his friends in the back for the sake of personal power and advantage!

In your criticism of Marxist philosophy you complain that Marxists burke the epistemological question. They do not burke it: they point out that the whole business about "our knowledge of the external world" arises from a severing of theory from practice. In Engels' words, "human action had solved the difficulty long before

human ingenuity invented it." Marxism is empiricism, but a radical empiricism that does not sit in an armchair waiting for experience to turn up, but puts its beliefs to the test of trial and error. As one who went (forty-six years ago!) through the mill of "Greats" and spent years of my life trying to "vindicate" scientific knowledge by idealistic juggling, I can speak from experience of the release and relief when I found in middle age that Marx and Engels (unbeknown to my teachers) had cut the Gordian knot for me before I was born and rendered all this scholasticism unnecessary.

You suggest that Marx thought the transition to Socialism would be "as easy as inevitable." He said it was inevitable, but he never said it would be easy. On the contrary, he rebuked his own facile Leftists for this very mistake. "You have got to go through fifteen, twenty, fifty years of civil wars and national wars not merely in order to change your conditions, but in order to change yourselves and become qualified for political power." That is not an easy-going gospel.

You say that Marxism claims to be "scientifically exact," that it refuses to be "changed by action," and that this renders it "utterly and wickedly irresponsible," "not true and not honest," "impudent, mischievous and destructive." Dear me! It is surprising that the same people who challenge Marxism as a "rigid dogma" attack the Soviets for "betraying the Revolution" when they adapt their application of Marxism to varying circumstances. As a matter of fact Marx and Engels never pretended that their theory was "scientifically exact" in the sense that, for example, mathematics is. No one was more severe than Marx on those who "tried to prescribe" to a class movement "according to a certain dogmatic recipe," or who treated his historic materialism as a "super-historical, universal passport." No one insisted more strongly than Engels that dialectical materialism was empirical or nothing—not a prescription from our inner consciousness of the course facts had to follow, but a "reflection of the actual development which is fulfilled in the world of nature." "The thing immediately to be done," wrote Marx, "depends entirely on the given historical conditions in which one has to act." And the

very “zig-zags” with which Communists are reproached show how far they have digested this lesson.

No, sir, your arrow misses the target.

Archibald Robertson.

THE GOVERNMENT'S TORY ANCESTOR

Originally published in *The Daily Worker* (2 November 1949): 2

Many years ago there was a Tory M.P. called Sir Frederick Banbury, later raised to the peerage as Lord Banbury of Southam.

During a debate on economy he gave vent to a memorable interjection: "Cut down education and leave the Army and Navy alone!"

The Labour Government are evidently of Banbury's opinion. Out of a total cut of £250 million, only £30 million is to come from war expenditure. The rest—cuts in health, housing, education, agriculture, food—falls on the people.

Yet the major cause of our insolvency is the "cold war" imposed on us by American capitalism and abjectly accepted by the Labour Government and trade union leaders.

Archibald Roberston
Oxford.

BULGARIAN TRIALS

Originally published in *The New Statesman and Nation* 38, no. 982 (1949): 781

Sir,—In your "London Diary" you charge Mr. Pritt with arguing "the nauseating thesis that all those who have been killed in any Communist trial have always been guilty." As I read his letter, he argues no such thing. He merely argues that specific defendants (trumpeted as innocent at the time by the whole bourgeois press) were in fact guilty in the estimation of witnesses who heard the trial, including one ambassador; and that before we similarly trumpet the innocence of Kostov and Co., it would be better to wait a bit.

Of course Communist tribunals are fallible. So was the Revolutionary Tribunal in the French Revolution. So are our own law-courts and courts-martial. The risk of error is a risk we run in any human act whatever. The question is, first, whether the risk should be accepted, and secondly, whether we at a distance are better qualified to judge than those on the spot.

Those who hold that the global victory of Socialism over capitalism is essential, if we are to escape, sooner or later, a sticky end by atom bombs and bacteria, regard that victory as a military operation in which the unity of Socialist forces is vital. Consequently disrupters of any kind (be they Trotsky, Zinoviev, Tito or Kostov) have to be squashed, and the risk, inherent in human affairs, of sometimes hitting the wrong man has to be accepted, as every general in the field accepts it.

As to the innocence or guilty of Kostov, only simpletons believe that Western capitalism has no agents in the East, and only simpletons believe that those agents are never caught. Incidentally, it is worth mentioning that Kostov's colleagues, who confessed in full, got off with imprisonment—which makes hay of your first sentence!

Archibald Robertson

THE REAL BATTLE

Originally published in *The Daily Worker* (1 November 1950): 2

Professor Flugel's talk of "ideological camps" is misleading, as it suggests that the only opposition is that of ideas. There is a battle of ideas, but it is only a shadow of the real battle. That is between those who want to run the world for business profits and those who want to run it for the people in it.

Business profits would "bust" if war preparation stopped. That is why big business and its pals whoever they are, want war and preparation and no peace appeals.

I am against military aggression and war propaganda. But I am for all and any "subversive action" that subverts the cynical business interests which have run us into two wars and are running us into a third.

Archibald Robertson

LETTER TO ATTLEE

Originally published in *The Daily Worker* (7 November 1950): 2

I have just sent the following letter to the Prime Minister. I do not expect any reply.

> Sir,—In your speech to the Foreign Press Association you say: "It is part of their [the Communists'] doctrine that lying is perfectly legitimate to further their cause." / I defy you to prove this statement. / It is in fact without foundation, and merely proves that lying is considered legitimate to further quite other causes than Communism. / I am an old Socialist who sat on Keir Hardie's platform when he was pelted with eggs by undergraduates here in 1908. I have been a member of the Fabian Society (1905–1915), the I.L.P. (1910–1915), the S.D.F. (1920–1930), the Labour Party (1920–1933), and for the last 12 years the Communist Party, which I joined because it alone continues and represents the revolutionary Socialism which I learnt from Hyndman, Bax and Morris and still hold fast.

I signed my name and posted the letter. On my way I voted for the Labour candidate in the Oxford by-election in spite of Attlee. In doing so I voted *for* nothing at all, but *against* a damned lot.

Archibald Robertson
Oxford.

BOYCOTT

Originally published in *The Daily Worker* (16 December 1950): 2

Britain is occupied by an American garrison. Seventy years ago Ireland was occupied by a garrison of English landlords. The Irish people used the weapon of boycott. No Irish patriot would do any service for an English landlord or his agent. Let the British workers now use the same weapon against the Yankee garrison in our midst. Then the atom-happy Yanks would know they were up against a *people*.

Archibald Robertson
Oxford.

PEACE CAMPAIGN

Originally published in *The New Statesman and Nation* 39, no. 1006 (1950): 684

Sir,—I gather from Critic's remarks in your issue of June 10 that the peace campaign is simply a Communist stunt, and therefore no real peace campaign at all, the reason being that Mr. Priestley and others are unable to discuss "Russian policies… with the same frankness as those of the Western warmongers" at its congress. The answer surely is that the purpose of the peace campaign is peace. Discussion of "Russian policies" would be relevant to that purpose only if there were evidence that the Soviet Union were plotting military aggression against other countries. You yourself, however, and indeed almost every responsible statesman who opens his mouth on the subject, however critical of "Russian policies," admit that there is no evidence that Russia is plotting war. Indeed, only a bemused ignoramus could suppose that a Power which has lately had its most fertile lands and its principal industries devastated by invaders would deliberately plan a war in which that experience is likely to be repeated tenfold.

Very well. Since common sense shows that Russia is not plotting war, why is there a war danger? The answer, from which I see no escape, is that the war danger comes from that country which suffered no material damage whatever in the last war, and indeed was enriched by it; that country which for generations back has been ruled by monopoly capitalists, who now see their world dominion shriveling before their eyes; that country which was the first to make the atomic bomb, and the first to use it; that country whose public men, alone of the public men of all countries, have actually advocated a preventive war; that country which has spent five years in building up bases thousands of miles from its frontiers, and with no intelligible intent except war; that country whose irresponsible press and radio have whipped its people into a state of hysteria in which they see witches in every university and flying saucers in every quarter of the

heaven, making them putty in the hands of the first brass-hat who decides that the time has come to push the button.

Public Enemy No. 1 is war. The object of the peace campaign is to prevent *that*. Discussion of "Russian policies" is a waste of time. The issue is not Communism; it is not democracy; it is not dictatorship; it is not the adventures of Mr. Kravchenko; it is not concentration camps; it is not the relative merits of judicial procedure in the U.S.S.R. and the U.S.A. It is whether you and I and tens of millions of human beings, perhaps half the world's population, perhaps all, are to be murdered by atomic lunatics in the name of "Christian civilisation" and the "Western way of life." Beside that everything else is irrelevant. To call the peace campaign "sectarian" because it does not waste precious time in argument about Stalinism and Titoism and Lord-knows-what is, I submit, to desert humanity at the most critical moment of its history.

Archibald Robertson

SOLOMON AND SECULAR HISTORY

Originally published in *The Literary Guide* (August 1951): 154–55

Recent discussion in *The Literary Guide* on the subject of the historicity of Solomon prompts me to draw attention to a document which has some bearing on the case. I refer to Josephus's treatise *Against Apion*. After Josephus had written his *Antiquities*, about AD 93–94, he was attacked as historians are apt to be, by a swarm of critics who challenged his credibility. In *Against Apion*, which seems to have been his last work, he replies to these critics. The work is unhappily named; for Apion, a anti-Semitic professor at Alexandria who flourished when Josephus was a small boy, is only one of the writers attacked, and not the most important. A sub-title, *On the Antiquity of the Jews*, describes the work much better. It is presumably disused to avoid confusion with the *Antiquities*.

Josephus starts by ridiculing the view that the silence of Greek historians disproves the antiquity of the Jews. He observes very justly that Egyptian, Babylonian, and Phoenician history antedates Greek. He has some critical and curiously modern things to say on the Homeric poems and on the discrepancies between Greek historians, and some uncritical and highly partial things to say on the value of the Jewish scriptures. All this we may pass over. The important part of the work is its assemblage of quotations from Egyptian, Babylonian, Phoenician, and other authorities bearing on Jewish history. Josephus could not read hieroglyphics or cuneiform. He therefore depends for Egyptian history on Manetho, an Egyptian priest who flourished under the Ptolemies and wrote a history of his country in Greek; for Babylonian history on Berossus, a Babylonian priest of the same period who did the same service for his country; and for Phoenician on Dius, a Tyrian historian otherwise unknown to us, and on a Greek writer, Menander of Ephesus.

Josephus's use of Manetho is not very happy. He tries to identify the Hyksos, the nomadic invaders who overran Egypt about 1800 BC and were expelled around 1580, with the Israelites of

Joseph's time, and signally fails. Nor does it seem to occur to him that he would be doing ill service to the Jews if he succeeded, for the Hyksos, on Manetho's showing, were ferocious savages from whom no decent Jew would be interested in tracing descent. Josephus quotes from Manetho a statement that the Hyksos, after their expulsion, founded Jerusalem. He fails to see that this statement, if there is anything in it, disproves the identification, for Jerusalem was a Canaanite city and did not become Jewish until the time of David.

From Berossus, Josephus quotes the statement that Nebuchadnezzar carried off Jewish and other captives to Babylonia and settled them in that country. This corresponds with the account of the Exile given in Kings, and may be taken as accrediting the Old Testament to that extent.

But Josephus's most interesting citations are from Dius and Menander. Dius, after relating the accession of Hiromus (Hiram), King of Tyre, and the public works executed by him in his own city, adds that Hiram and his contemporary, Solomon of Jerusalem, engaged in a friendly contest of solving riddles. Solomon, we are told, successfully "stumped" Hiram, but was "stumped" in his turn by a Tyrian named Abdemun and had to pay up! Menander of Ephesus also mentions Abdemun's prowess at Solomon's expense. Of course, we do not know whether Menander and Dius were independent authorities. Josephus further cites Tyrian public records for the statement that Solomon's temple was built 143 years before the foundation of Carthage, and says that correspondence between Hiram and Solomon was preserved at Tyre down to his own day.

I do not wish to be misunderstood. This does not prove that Hiram and Solomon really exchanged riddles or that the correspondence preserved at Tyre was authentic. But it does, I submit, prove that Tyrians, and not only Jews, believed Solomon to be a historical king. It is true that we know nothing of Dius beyond the quotation in Josephus. But it is unlikely that Josephus invented the quotation. That would be a dangerous thing to do in a controversial work meant for circulation among educated readers. Nor is it likely that a Jew interpolated the story of the riddles. A Jew would not have

allowed his hero Solomon to be finally beaten by a bright young Tyrian. It is far more likely that a Tyrian story-teller, knowing of the Jewish king's reputation for wisdom, invented the anecdote to show that his compatriots, after all, had the last word in smartness.

I do not say that this proves the historicity of Solomon. It is not *a priori* impossible that a Jewish myth should have imposed on Tyrians as well as Jews. But it is, I think, a little improbable. After all, many of the Old Testament kings are known by monumental evidence to have really lived. Ahab, Jehu, Mesha of Moab, Menahem, Ahaz, and Hezekiah are as historical as Croessus or Polycrates, though, like them, they are to a greater or less degree the subject of legend. Where are we to draw the line between history and myth? Is every Biblical character, other than those explicitly named in secular sources, to be pronounced a myth? That would be a very arbitrary criterion, if we consider the large element of accident that has contributed to the survival of monumental and documentary evidence.

It is true that we have no contemporary testimony to the existence of Solomon. But it so happens that contemporary testimony to the events of the ten century BC anywhere in the ancient world is singularly poor. Egypt after the twentieth dynasty (about 1200 BC) entered a period of decline, leaving very meagre records, and did not revive until the twenty-second dynasty, whose founder Sheshonk, invaded Palestine after the time of Solomon. Assyrian history at the time is very obscure. It was not till the ninth century that its great era began. Greece was not yet even civilized; the Minoan age was dead, and classical culture had not begun. When we are told that there is no external testimony, it is relevant to ask who was there to provide it.

I am not concerned to adjudicate the case. I feel, however, that on this and similar historical questions it is important to take all available evidence into consideration. As many readers may be unfamiliar with the evidence cited by Josephus in the *Apion* treatise, I put it forward for what it is worth. Archibald Robertson.

NAPALM

Originally published in *The Daily Worker* (5 June 1952): 2

Anthony Eden, who refused to condemn the use of napalm in the House of Commons, should be known as "Napalm" Eden to the end of his days. Nigel Birch, who called it a merciful weapon, should be known as "Napalm" Birch. If these and other politicians were normal human beings they would go to their death-beds haunted by the screams of the living torches lit by napalm. As they are not, they should be damned by decent opinion everywhere.

Archibald Robertson
Oxford.

SAME OLD CRY

Originally published in *The Daily Worker* (8 December 1952): 2

The Tory breed does not change. I remember when the Liberal imperialist Government of 1906 arrested and deported without trial a highly respectable Indian nationalist, the late Zala Zajpat Rai. A typical Tory, Sir Howard Vincent, interjected in the House of Commons, "Why not shoot Zajpat Rai?" Now in Kenya Colonel Grogan, one of the same litter, advocates hanging 25 per cent of the African leaders to intimidate the rest.

Archibald Robertson
Oxford.

ROYALTY AND HUMAN RIGHTS

Originally published in *The Literary Guide and Rationalist Review* (September 1953): 137–38

Twice in twenty years a controversy about a marriage has hit the headlines in this country. The case of the Duke of Windsor is ancient history and its facts are well known. In recent months the popular Press, not only in Britain but in America and in the Dominions, has been concerning itself with the possible engagement of Princess Margaret to a divorced gentleman. The facts are not yet known to the public; but the Government has announced its intention of introducing a bill to amend the Regency law, and it is generally understood that the Bill will settle the Regency on the Duke of Edinburgh instead of on the Princess. As the Press before the event speculated on this change in the Regency law as a result of the alleged attachment, we are justified in concluding that something unusual prompted the Government decision.

The common feature of both cases is the assumption that a royal person, by mere fact of being royal, is disbarred from acts which are legal and respectable in anyone else. The remarriage of divorced persons is allowed by the law of the land and, it is safe to say, incurs no social opprobrium of any sort among the majority of modern people. True, the Catholic Church does not recognize divorce, and therefore does not recognize remarriage if the other party to the divorce is still living. True, the Church of England is at sixes and sevens on this as on most other questions. But the Catholic and Anglican Churches together enjoy the active allegiance of only a minority of the population. Yet royalty in the matter of marriage are expected to toe the line of the Catholic Church and the "spikier" Anglicans, and are deprived of a liberty claimed and exercised without cavil by myriads of ordinary citizens and by members of the present Government.

Here is something on which Rationalists might profitably use their reason. I shall not be suspected of royalist bias. Like Pain,

Shelly, Carlile, Bradlaugh, Swinburne, Foote, and other great Rationalists of the past, I am a republican. I think it superstitious to credit a particular family with all the virtues and to treat its head, to all intents and purposes, as a sort of demigod or demigoddess. But because I think it irrational to treat royalty as more than human, I see no reason why for one purpose—that of marriage—they should be treated as less than human. That is not only superstitious, but also hypocritical and cruel. As a Rationalist and as a republican I hold that royalty should have the same human rights as other people—no more, no less—and should be free to marry or remarry subject to no restraint but the law of the land.

ON some points indeed the law of the land itself imposes disabilities. Under the Act of Settlement no Catholic and no person married to a Catholic may succeed to the throne of Great Britain. Under the Royal Marriage Act of 1772 no member of the royal family under twenty-five years of age may marry without royal assent, and those over twenty-five may marry against the sovereign's wish only after twelve months' notice to the Privy Council and may have their marriages vetoed by both Houses of Parliament (a rather remote possibility, I should think, in these days). The repeal of this legislation may be theoretically desirable, but is hardly practical politics. There is, however, no Act of Parliament excluding divorced persons or those who married them from succession to the throne. I do not know what other Rationalists think, but I should vigorously oppose the passage of such an Act. In its absence, I strongly object to the attempt to use newspaper agitation, ecclesiastical pressure, and the rest of the bag of tricks spuriously named "public opinion" to impose conformity to a rule unscantioned by the law. We had enough of that in 1936. Let us have no more of it.

Of course I know the answer to all this. People in the mass, I shall be told, are not governed by reason, but by myths deep-seated in what psychoanalysts call the unconscious. The unconscious, we are told, requires a father-figure to love, idealize, and obey. It also requires a father-figure to hate, denigrate, and disobey. The first need is supplied by the monarch, the second by the Prime Minister. (What

happens when the monarch is a queen I am not clear; presumably the unconscious then wants a mother-figure instead. And what happens if you belong to the Prime Minister's party I am not clear either; presumably the need of a hateful father-figure is then supplied by the Leader of the Opposition. But never mind!) In order that this need of unconscious, whatever it is, may be supplied, the monarch, and any member of the royal family who may conceivably succeed to the throne, must be of blameless life. (This law of nature was presumably suspended during the reign of Edward VII—to say nothing of some of his predecessors. But again, never mind!) A standard of respectability which suffices the subjects will not do for royalty. Their standard must be much stricter. They must by their domestic virtues make a vicarious atonement for the domestic imperfections of the rest of us. A monarch or prospective monarch must be at one and the same time a man or woman "just like us," and a myth whose virtue consists in being *not* like us. Otherwise (at least since 1910) the monarchy will not work, England will go to pieces, and we may look for red ruin and the breaking up of laws.

That (except for the historical qualifications, which are my own) is the case as I have seen it put by writers in the Press during these last few months. I think we Rationalists should ask ourselves whether we really believe it. Do we really believe that our countrymen and countrywomen can be governed only [by][44] telling them preposterous lies (not always told in the past) about the exceptional virtues of a family which, as far as evidence goes, is neither better nor worse than the rest of us? If so, the family so unfortunately placed must take the rough with the smooth and must try to live up to the lies we find it necessary to tell. But once we admit myth as a necessary instrument of government, why stop at the royal family? Does not exactly the same argument apply to the Christian religion? If the art of government demands that we tell people lies about a family living in the twentieth century, may it not equally demand that we tell them lies about a family said to have lived in the first? If the unconscious needs a monarch-myth, may it not also need

[44] Editors: This was written "be" in the essay, which is a clear typographical error.

a Christ-myth? Plenty of authorities will tell us that it does; in which case the Rationalist Press Association had better shut up shop.

The alternative is to be honest, whether about holy families in the first or royal families in the twentieth century. If we must have royalty, let it be royalty without myths which, translated into action, smear our national life with pretence and may rebound cruelly on the very individuals we set out to idealize.

THE SLAVONIC JOSEPHUS AGAIN

Originally published in *The Literary Guide* (October 1953): 166–67

It is over twenty years since the late Robert Eisler attempted to establish a historic basis for statements on Christianity found in a Slavonic version of the *Jewish War* of Josephus originally discovered in Russia in 1866. Eisler was a man of immense erudition in more than one field—economics and history as well as Biblical criticism. He was also a thoroughgoing Rationalist, and as a Jew by origin he could not be accused of Christian bias. But he had a weakness for treating his ingenious hypotheses as proved facts. His theory of a genuine nucleus to the disputed passages in the Slavonic Josephus, though accepted by Salomon Reinach and tentatively by St. John Thackeray, failed to convince the majority of scholars and should be handled very gingerly by students of Christian origins.

In a book now published[45] Mr. Rupert Furneaux dons the mantle of Eisler and reinforces his theory with the more recent work of Dr. S. G. F. Brandon on *The Fall of Jerusalem and the Christian Church*. Much of Mr. Furneaux's book deserves high praise. It has the merit (not shared by all writers on the subject) of beginning at the beginning and addressing itself to readers who have had a Christian education and are only just opening their minds to a Rationalist approach. This is his justification for going in detail over a good deal of ground which is familiar to the seasoned Rationalist. In pleading for the examination of Christian origins without preconceived beliefs; in pointing out that the Gospels are not the work of eyewitnesses, but were written as propaganda at earliest after AD 70; and in insiting that in writings of this nature only texts which tell *against* their main thesis can be used as historical evidence—in all this Mr. Furneaux is

[45] *The Other Side of the Story*. The strange story of Christianity: the Dark Spot of History. A solution to an age-old enigma suggested by the long-suppressed evidence of non-Christian contemporaries, by Rupert Furneaux. (Cassell.) xii + 220 pp., including 21 pp. Appendices and 8 pp. Index; 12s 6d. [Editors: Note is original to source]

on sound critical lines. He is equally sound in stressing the fact, first demonstrated by Baur and the Tübingen school, but unpardonably glossed over in apologetic books of reference, that Paul and the Jerusalem apostles taught two opposite gospels, not only about the relation of Christianity to Judaism, but about the nature of Christ himself. Paul accuses his opponents in so many words of preaching "another Jesus whom we did not preach." I think Mr. Furneaux hardly follows this line of argument through to its conclusion. Is a Paul who gets converted to a sect which he previously persecuted, but who on conversion refuses to learn anything form its leaders and starts preaching a contradictory gospel to theirs, a credible person at all? However, let that pass. With Mr. Furneaux's thesis that Pauline Christianity flatly contradicted the gospel of the Jerusalem leaders and, after failing at first, came into its own only after the fall of Jerusalem, and that the Gospels as we have them were written to smother the real story of the beginnings of the movement, I cordially agree.

It is otherwise when, following Eisler, he tries to use the Slavonic Josephus to bolster this (in itself) reasonable conclusion. The Slavonic MSS date from the thirteenth century,[46] and are the work of a heretical sect which flourished in Russia at that time and which denied the divinity of Jesus. To support their heresy they translated certain MSS of the *Jewish War* from Greek into Slavonic or Old Russian. The Slavonic MSS contain matter about John the Baptist and about Jesus which is totally absent from the Greek text we know. Does any of this matter go back to Josephus, or is it all medieval interpolation? Some of it is admitted by Eisler and by Mr. Furneaux to be spurious. Josephus cannot possibly have written that Jesus was "the only-born son of God," or that "his nature and form were God-manlike," or that "his deeds were divine," or that the Jewish scribes bribed Pilate to let them crucify him.

[46] Editors: This is incorrect. The earliest manuscript available is from the fifteenth century CE. However, it is theorized the extant MSS go back to the thirteenth century.

This is exactly on par with the well-known forgery in the *Antiquities*, and for most scholars is sufficient reason for dismissing the whole of the additions in the Slavonic text as interpolations. Against this, Eisler and Mr. Furneaux argue (1) that there are many other additions unrelated to Christianity which medieval forgers could have had no reason to invent; (2) that the matter dealing with John the Baptist so conflicts with the Gospels, both in making him appear thirty years before the date assigned by Luke and in making him a political revolutionary, that no Christian conversant with the Gospels could have written it; and (3) that while matter supporting Christianity is justifiably dismissed as an interpolation, matter hostile to Christianity must be accepted as authentic.

The difficulty here is that the Slavonic texts are not the work of orthodox Christians, but of heretics. Phrases, therefore, which are hostile to orthodox Christianity need not necessarily be hostile to the variety which they favoured. For example, the description of Jesus as of "commonplace physique" is certainly contrary to orthodox iconography, but may nevertheless have been acceptable to dissident Christians, who could quote in its support Isa. 53—"he hath no form nor comeliness."

It seems to me that the extraction of genuine texts of Josephus from translations made nearly 1,200 years after his time is a risky speculation and that, with all due deference to Salomon Reinach, Eisler, and Mr. Furneaux, the verdict must be "not proven." It is a pity; for if their position could be established, the results to orthodoxy would be catastrophic. But Rationalists owe respect to the laws of evidence; and it is no more permissible to try to establish the natural origin of Christianity by dubious medieval MSS than it is to buttress the myth theory by garbling a sentence from Justin.

Mr. Furneaux is apparently unaware of the vital contribution to "the other side of the story" made in recent years by the discovery and deciphering of the Dead Sea scrolls emanating from the Essene sect. If he were to turn his attention to Professor Dupont-Sommer's book on the subject, he would find a firmer foundation under his feet than that provided by the industrious, but over-speculative Eisler.

Meanwhile, Rationalists who want to form an opinion on the Slavonic Josephus and who cannot obtain Eisler's *The Messiah Jesus and John the Baptist* will find a handy substitute in this book.

TRUE TO FORM

Originally published in *The Daily Worker* (4 December 1953): 2

In her reminiscence of the Black and Tans (Talking Points, November 30) Sheila Lynd omits one thing. Churchill was a member of the Cabinet which let loose the Black and Tans on Ireland.[47] In Kenya he is true to form.

Archibald Robertson
Oxford.

[47] Editors: The Black and Tans were a suppressive police force employed by the British government to brutally repress and commit mass democide against the Irish population during their War for Independence. The British stifling of the Irish right to self-determinacy and their national liberation was a brutal conquest and part of an ongoing (to this day) habit of oppression and genocide of the Irish masses.

COMMUNICATION

Originally published in *Past & Present* 4 (1953): 76–77

I have read (and re-read) with much interest John Morris' article on the relation of early Christianity to the social background of the Roman Empire. I find some points extremely well put—for example, the importance of Paul's Roman citizenship and the social position which that implies; the contrasting contributions to Christianity of the political quietism reflected in the Pauline Epistles and the revolutionary yearnings represented by the Apocalypse; the important role of Irenaeus. I hope John Morris will one day give us a fuller history of a revolution of which the true story has never yet been told.

But to see primitive Christianity in perspective we must assess the documentary evidence at its proper value. This, I submit, is not done in the article. Morris thinks, for example, that "the substance" of the Acts of the Apostles was written near the date when its narrative closes—that is, near the time of Paul's imprisonment at Rome in the reign of Nero. From this dating Morris infers that the story told in the Acts was believed in Jerusalem around 58 A.D. If so, the Acts are a document of enormous historical importance; and as such Morris treats them.

But is it so? The Acts are the second volume of a work of which the first volume is the Gospel of Luke. If the Acts were written under Nero, Luke's Gospel cannot be dated later, and Mark, on which much of Luke is based, must be earlier still. The historical importance which Morris attaches to the Acts would then equally attach to Mark's and Luke's Gospels. Yet this cannot be what Morris means; for he says that the Gospels "did not receive their present form before the years 120–140." Presumably he holds that, while the substance of Luke-Acts dates from Nero's reign, the work was interpolated and given its present form from 120 and 140. But if so, what becomes of the validity of the Acts in their present form as evidence of the belief of Christians in Jerusalem about 58? Apart from these considerations,

the nature of the narrative of the Acts, starting with the physical ascension of Christ into heaven and punctuated by miraculous gifts of tongues, cures, killings and escapes from prison, surely discounts it as history and stamps it as romance. An exception may be made in favour of journey-narratives written in the first person, which it is difficult to believe were invented. But further than this we can hardly go.

Morris finds the narrative of the Acts agrees with the narrative deduced from the Epistles except for "insignificant chronological difficulties." I am afraid the difficulties are more than chronological and far from insignificant. In the Epistles Paul stresses again and again that the gospel which he preaches is the product of a special revelation to himself, that he owes nothing to the Jewish Christian Church, that his contacts with them have been occasional only, that for years after his conversion he was "unknown" to them "by face." He bitterly anathematises the preachers of "another gospel" and leaves us in no doubt that he means the Jewish Christian leaders (2 Cor. 10–11, Gal. 1–2). In the Acts, on the contrary, Paul after his conversion works in close conjunction and in complete harmony with the Jewish Christians. A few nameless people try to make trouble between Jewish and Gentile converts, but are disposed of at a single conference (Acts 15). There is no squaring the two accounts and no escape from the conclusion that the writer of the Acts is trying to hush up what had been a bitter and prolonged conflict. It is impossible not to connect this conflict with the contradiction, which Morris rightly recognises, between the revolutionary dreams of the Jewish Church and Paul's injunction of submission to Rome.

In view of this it can hardly be maintained that "Pauline Christianity took its stand on a root and branch opposition to the established organisation of society." I fail to see any root and branch opposition, for example, in Romans 13. Unquestionably there were Christians who looked for "cataclysmic revolution"; but was Paul one? His characteristic contribution to the subject is the dictum that "flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God," and the consequent removal of the "kingdom" to a region above the clouds or

beyond the grave. Compare and contrast this with the "new heaven and new *earth*" of the Apocalypse.

Morris' theory here seems incompatible with the statement with which I cordially agree, that, but for the revolutionary and anti-Pauline tradition of Jewish Christianity (represented by the Apocalypse and the Epistle of James) with which later Church leaders had to reckon, "Christianity might have shrunk to a philosophy of the leisured class, an inoffensive neo-Stoicism." The key to the history of early Christianity and to its alternating persecution and toleration by Roman emperors down to Diocletian is to be sought, I submit, in the contradictory elements of Jewish militancy and Pauline mysticism (the ideologies of different social strata) which went to its making.

Oxford.
Archibald Robertson.

AUTHOR'S REPLY TO CRITIC

Originally published in *Jewish Quarterly* 2, no. 1 (1954): 76–78

In the spring issue of *The Jewish Quarterly*, Mr. Joshua Podro takes me to task for applying Marxist methods to the investigation of Christian origins. I naturally do not expect agreement from Mr. Podro, who is not a Marxist, but some of his complaints I frankly do not understand. He accuses me of "a lack of inner understanding of Jewish political, social and moral problems in the first century." Perhaps the operative word here is "inner." It is true that I am not a Jew; but I have tried as hard as a Gentile can—and a great deal harder than the average Christian does—to give a "sympathetic understanding" to Jewish patriotism, to do justice to the Torah as the People's Charter of the ancient world, and to portray the Jewish struggle against Graeco-Roman imperialism as it deserves. Mr. Podro's suggestion that only an "inner" (i.e., Jewish) approach can meet the case is surely as unreasonable as the late Hilaire Belloc's claim that only Catholics knew what the Catholic Church was.

I should not dream of competing with Mr. Podro as a Talmudist, but when he takes me up on what he calls a "ludicrous error" about the Essenes, I am entitled to point out that the "error" is taken straight from Kohler's article on the Essens in the *Jewish Encyclopaedia*. Kohler there says: "In their efforts to make domestic and social life comfortable and cheerful, the Pharisees characterised the Essene as 'a fool who destroys the world'." If I err, therefore, I err in good Jewish company. But do I err? Kohler gives as the reference Sotah iii,4. In that passage of the Mishnah I read: "R. Joshua… used to say: A foolish saint and a cunning knave and a woman that is a hypocrite and the wounds of the Pharisees, these wear out the world" (Danby's translation). The question is whether Kohler and I are right in equating the "foolish saint" with the Essene. It seems to be agreed that Pharisees and Essenes were both offshoots of the *Hasidim* of Maccabean times. But if Rabbi Joshua had meant a Pharisee, surely he would have said a Pharisee. That he meant an

Essene is therefore not an unreasonable inference: and in drawing it I have Kohler to back me.

This, however, is a detail. Even if Mr. Podro is right and Kohler and I wrong, all that would follow would be that the Pharisees' estimate of the Essenes was less unfavourable than we supposed.

A more serious question is the extent to which we are justified in using the Talmud as an infallible guide to the Judaism of the first century. The compilation of the Mishnah began in the period following the destruction of Jerusalem (70 C.E.) and was not completed until the beginning of the third century. The Gemara dates from the third, fourth and fifth centuries. Between early first-century Judaism, therefore, and even the earliest part of the written Talmud there intervenes the catastrophe of 70, just as between primitive Christianity and almost the whole New Testament (all, in fact, except the authentic nucleus of Paul) there intervenes the same catastrophe. Mr. Podro has proved in *The Nazarene Gospel Restored* that the Christian documents were materially falsified in the light of the event. Yet he asks us to believe that Jewish compilers, writing at the same time or even later, resisted all temptation to falsify! What evidence have we that the compilers of the Talmud were more faithful in their use of their materials than the compilers of the New Testament? Both alike had the strongest motives for deleting evidence that first-century Judaism or first-century Nazarenism (as the case may be) had been actively revolutionary. We surely need not be surprised if such evidence is hard to find in second-century and later documents, whether Jewish or Christian.

For evidence on first-century Judaism and first-century Christianity we must go primarily to Jospehus, always bearing in mind his self-confessed treason and motives for falsification; Philo; Tacitus and Seutonius, who wrote early in the second century, but grew up in the first and remembered it well; and whatever in the New Testament and the Talmud is unlikely to have been invented later and therefore may be accepted as evidential. Both the Talmud and the New Testament must be allowed their say; but to accept either uncritically is, I submit, unsound. Mr. Podro's claim that the Talmud

should be accorded more weight than other authorities in dealing with the first century lacks justification.

In my book I try to write of the first century as if I were writing of any other period. I give the documents their due weight, but not more than their weight, and am not ashamed to stand on the shoulders of the great critics who have dealt with them before me. I use the Marxist theory of the class struggle as a key to open doors which remain obstinately shut to other methods of investigation—in particular to answer the question why Greek and Roman rulers, who were certainly not bigoted in religion, should have been impelled again and again to persecute (and to persecute most savagely) Jews and Christians who, on the showing of their present-day representatives, were mere religious devotees with nothing revolutionary about them. I have sought the answer by getting behind the falsified documents to historical facts. If anyone can find a better, good luck to him!

I do not know why Mr. Podro thinks Paul's collection for the "poor saints" amounted only to "a few hundred denarii." Money was collected in several Roman provinces—Macedonia, Achaia, Galatia, Asia. Paul thanks God "for his unspeakable gift" (2 Cor. 9:15). I suspect it was a tidy sum!

REVIEW OF KARL KAUTSKY'S *FOUNDATIONS OF CHRISTIANITY*

Originally published in *Science & Society* 18, no. 2 (1954): 187–88.

Karl Kautsky was one of the famous figures of the Second International which was disrupted by the outbreak of war in 1914. His *Ursprung des Christenthums*, published in 1908 and now translated for English-speaking readers, is an attempt to apply the Marxist conception of history as a record of class struggles to the revolution which ended pagan antiquity and ushered in the Christian Middle Ages. In making his attempt Kautsky was a pioneer; for, as he points out, historians as distinct from theologians, usually avoid dealing with the origins of Christianity. The subject is too polemical and the sources too doctored for a scholar to handle unless he positively enjoys having mud thrown at him.

Kautsky begins by considering the sources. No Gospel was written until after the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70; and the writings contradict one another and contain flagrant falsifications. Paul's letters are of very disputable authenticity and tell us nothing except that he was crucified and rose again. The New Testament tells us next to nothing credible of Christian origins, but much of the social life and ideas of primitive Christian organizations.

Next, Kautsky deals with the economic background of early Christianity—the monster slave-empire of Rome. It was a decadent society in which the gang-labor of slaves had driven free labor off the land to form an unemployed and parasitic mass in the big cities. The Gospel saying, "Foxes have holes, but the Son of man has not where to lay his head," had been anticipated by Tiberius Gracchus in 133 B.C. when he said that the wild beasts of Italy had holes, but that her fighting men were robbed of house and home and had nothing but air and light. This rotten economy was kept going only by victorious wars and new supplies of slaves. When they failed it was doomed. It was in that period of crisis, slowly deepening to collapse, that Christianity took form.

In that slave-empire there was one corner where, at the beginning of the Christian era, political life survived and hope was not dead. From the beginning of history Palestine had been a border region where the desert and civilization met, empires clashed and trade routes crossed. The Israelites who inhabited it were backward in industry and art—a pastoral people with trade as a side-line. Wedged in between robber-empires, they were born to be under-dogs in the struggle for power. Bitter experience of conquest and exile gave them a permanent "grouse" against the world. They became a people of traders, artisans and miscellaneous small men scattered among the Mediterranean cities, fanatically clannish and waiting for a day when their God would smash the robber-empires and give them the kingdom of the earth. They were a subversive leaven in any big empire, Greek or Roman, which happened to be exploiting the Mediterranean peoples at the time. It ended in the Romans smoking out Jerusalem like a dangerous hornet's nest.

Christianity originated as a movement of proletarians (not in the modern sense of wage-earners, but in the sense of down-and-out city-dwellers with nothing to lose) who took literally this Jewish dream of a kingdom of God on earth and, pending its early arrival, tried to mend their immediate misery by pooling and sharing what goods they had. This tradition of communism, argues Kautsky, is the one thing about primitive Christianity which we can really be said to know; for the official Church of later centuries, set on conciliating the ruling class, would never have invented it. The communism of the early Christians led to a repudiation of family ties, sometimes taking the form of celibacy, sometimes of unbridled license (though I find Kautsky's argument that license was widespread very unconvincing). In the Kingdom of God soon to be set up everyone would receive a hundredfold what he had surrendered, and food and drink would be unlimited. The first Christians, and Jesus himself so far as we can glean anything trustworthy about him, were ready to use force against the temple traders. But our Gospels have been so rewritten that only a touch here and there betrays the revolutionary character of the original movement. For after Jerusalem had fallen, Christian leaders

set themselves deliberately to efface the facts and to substitute a crucified and resurrected God for the Galilean rebel.

Kautsky's book is a good introduction to the problems that face a Marxist interpreter of those times. Important evidence has been unearthed since his death—notably the Dead Sea Scrolls, which throw a flood of light on the revolutionary movement of the Essenes before the

Christian era. But no reconstruction can ignore his painstaking social and economic analysis of the background of Christianity.

Archibald Robertson
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CORRESPONDENCE (3)

Originally published in *The New Statesman and Nation* 49, no. 1252 (5 March 1955): 324

[Editors: This issue of the microfilm of *NSN* was damaged and a few words on the end of the article are obstructed. We have endeavored to replace them and placed those which are completely gone in brackets.]

Sir,—In their illuminating article, Mr. Crossman and Mr. Wigg urge that Britain should remain [in] Nato and manufacture H-bombs as "the ultimate deterrent," while using diplomatic means to avoid the predicament of war. They dismiss the alternative of neutrality, while admitting that American policy may finally force us into it.

Surely that point has already been reached. The Americans have ordered their forces to defend Quemoy in disregard, apparently, of the "dismay" caused over here by that policy. What follows? A Chinese attempt on Quemoy (which nobody denies is a Chinese island) may be resisted [by] America and involve total war in the Far East. Presumably we shall then proclaim our neutrality. [But] what use will that be when strong American bomber bases exist in our country? Our neutrality is compromised in advance. We are in the position in which Belgium would have been in 1914 had she admitted the Germans to her territory *before* the declaration of war, as a guarantee against French aggression.

Surely it is time we Britons displayed why Messrs. Crossman and Wigg dub "narrow national self-interest" and declared uncompromising neutrality, with the corollary of serving notice [of] quit on the American forces over here. After [all?] we were told in 1948 that they were here [for] "temporary training," and they have been trained long enough.

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THE END OF ANTIQUITY

Originally published in *The Literary Guide and Rationalist Review* 70, no. 5 (1955): 10–11

The objection to being fooled is the beginning of rationalism. And we are fooled so much in our homes, our schools, and our universities about the way things began that every rationalist naturally wants to have the bogus story replaced by a true story—not only how the whole thing began, which is the subject of astronomy and cosmology; not only how man began, which is the subject of biology and anthropology; but how the particular thing began which we call Christian civilization, and to defend which we are told to be ready if necessary to commit nuclear race suicide.

The Old Story

The story which we are told in childhood is that nearly two thousand years ago, when the world had become very wicked indeed, God himself became man in order to redeem it; that God was born, grew to manhood, and went about doing good in Palestine under the Roman Empire; that he was crucified—apparently for doing good—by the procurator Pontius Pilate, but (naturally, being God) rose from the dead and founded a Church of do-gooders to carry on; that these do-gooders, the Christians, were savagely persecuted by the Roman emperors for two or three centuries—apparently for doing good and for having scruples about dropping a pinch of incense on the fire before the emperor's statue; until at least a good emperor called Constantine saw how wicked the other emperors had been, and established Christianity and doing good as the religion of the world for ever after.

It simply will not do. Quite apart from such questions as who wrote the New Testament or whether Jesus ever lived and all that, experience tells us that sane men do not persecute people who do them good, but people who do them evil or, at a pinch, who they think

may do them evil. In the Roman emperors we are dealing with sane statesmen like Trajan, Marcus Aurelius and Diocletian. What a madman like Nero did is not to the point. What could have worked up Marcus or Diocletian to such a pitch as to order men and women to be thrown to wild beasts, roasted alive, or otherwise misused? Not a silly scruple about a pinch of incense. Then what?

I am afraid that the latest book on the subject, *Christ and the Caesars: Historical Sketches*, by Ethelbert Stauffer (SCM Press, 18s), does nothing but tell the old story over again with some interesting, but irrelevant illustrations from ancient coins and sculptures. Professor Stauffer has made coins his speciality and, being enthusiastic for his subject, greatly exaggerates the light which they can throw on the ordinary life of the times in which they were struck.

Ancient rulers decorated their coins with emblems of divinity and titles like "father of his country" and so on. To Professor Stauffer this proves that the whole ancient world was waiting for a god to appear on earth. The ordinary mortal who tendered a coin for a drink or a pair of shoes probably gave no more thought to the inscription on it than we give to the *Dei gratia* on our money.

The inscriptions are interesting as showing what the governments which designed them wanted to advertise. They are no evidence that the advertisement sold the goods.

However, to Professor Stauffer a coin reveals not only government policy, but the great heart of the people throughout the Roman Empire. Since everybody on this showing was pining for a Saviour, poetic justice demanded that a Saviour should come; and by reading the New Testament and other Christian literature with uncritical faith he shows that the demand was marvellously supplied. For the rest, the book consists of bad logic—as when the author, commenting on the Gospel story of the tribute money, argues that anyone handling Roman *denarii* was morally bound to pay tribute (if Hitler had conquered England, and we had to pay German notes for our bread and cheese, would that have made resistance immoral?);

bad historical judgement—as when he calls the emperor Claudius "an insignificant fool"; and rhetorical fustian *ad libitum*.

Forgery

Sometimes Professor Stauffer takes it on himself to fake evidence that is not there, as when he tells us that "Josephus' account of the beginnings of Christianity reaches its climax in a note justifying the sentence of Pilate and closes with the alarming remark that 'nevertheless the Christians have no died out'." Whatever Josephus *did* say has been hopelessly effaced by forgery. Professor Stauffer has no right to parade this reconstruction as if it were a matter of fact. And when he says, "The Christians could be attacked, persecuted, tortured to death without uttering a word that could be called political polemics," has he forgotten the invective of Minucius Felix against the power which, "in origin a collection of criminals," held all it had by virtue of plunder and slaughter? *Totiens ergo Romanis inpiatum est quotiens triumphatum*—"each Roman triumph has meant a new impiety." If an educated Christian in the early third century could write like that, what was the language of the rank and file who had drunk the heady wine of apocalyptic propaganda?

No one can begin to understand the end of ancient civilization who does not see that, like its fellows, it was an arena of class struggle, and that Christianity was a complex product of that struggle.

FAMILY PORTRAIT

Originally published in *The New Statesman and Nation* 50, no. 1264 (28 May 1955): 751

Sir,—Mr. J. R. L. Charleton is mistaken in thinking that the three passages named by him are the only places in the Bible where brothers of Jesus are referred to. There are also Matthew 13:55–56 and Mark 6:3, where the brothers are mentioned by name, and sisters are mentioned too: John 2:12 and 7:3, 5, 10; Acts 1:14; 1 Corinthians 9:5; and Galatians 1:19, where one of the brothers is named again.

The Hebrew language may have had no separate name for "cousin"; but the New Testament is written in Greek. When St. Paul wants to say that St. Mark is the cousin of St. Barnabas, he uses the Greek word *anepsios* (Colossians 4:10 and not *adelphos*, the word for "brother." *Family Portrait* is based on the natural assumption that the New Testament means what it says.

Roman Catholics have a right to put any farfetched construction they please on the texts in question. But what right have they—a minority—to dictate to the majority of listeners what they shall or shall not hear on Easter Sunday or any other day? And is not the characterisation of a play as "quasi-blasphemous," merely because it represents the mother of Jesus as a normal mother and not a virgin quasi-goddess (I thank Mr. Charleton for that word "quasi"!) indicative of a basically pagan and rather nasty slant on life?

Archibald Robertson
Oxford

THE MYTH THEORY—A SYMPOSIUM

[Editors: This was published in *The Rationalist Annual* (1956) as a symposium between Robertson and the Russian Byzantinist A. Kazhdan, who became notable in the debate on Jesus' historicity into the 1960s. Kazhdan's critiques (translated into English) of Robertson are generally in line with the Soviet "Mythological School" of thought on Jesus' historicity and in accordance are rather fair. I print here only Archibald Robertson's response, which was on pp. 76–81. At this juncture, Robertson also reveals he had not yet learned Russian. No doubt the interactions with Soviet scholars prompted him to do so, as by the late 50s he could read, write, and translate the language.]

My attention has been drawn to A. Kazhdan's review of my book, *The Origins of Christianity*, in *Vestnik Drevnei Istorii*, No. 4, 1954.

I am much gratified by Kazhdan's fair and objective treatment of my book. It is satisfactory that a Soviet critic sees in it a genuine attempt on Marxist lines to relate early Christianity to the social conditions in which it arose, and that he recommends it to the attention of Soviet historians.

With regard to the criticisms which Kazhdan passes on the book, on one point I have no alternative but to unconditional surrender. I am sure that I should have written a better and perhaps longer book if I had read the works of A. B. Ranovich, R. Y. Vipper, and S. I. Kovalevsky. Unfortunately the works of these Soviet historians are not available in English, and I do not read Russian. That is a difficulty which besets the path of Marxist scholars. I do not say that I should necessarily have agreed with every conclusion of these three authors. But I should have learnt much even where I disagreed.

As it is, I must cut my coat according to my cloth and attempt to deal on their merits with Kazhdan's criticisms.

Kazhdan appears to find an inconsistency in my combining the materialist conception of history with an acknowledgement of the historicity of Jesus, John the Baptist, Paul, and other characters in the

New Testament. But surely the materialist conception of history, and the historicity of this or that personage, are two different questions. To hold the materialist conception of history it is necessary first to be a materialist in philosophy, and then to apply materialism radically—that is dialectically—to human affairs. But the question of the historicity of a particular personage is a matter of evidence on which different materialists may reach different conclusions—especially when, as in this case, the evidence is incomplete.

What a materialist cannot do is to admit the action of mind independently of matter anywhere in history. This excludes the traditional view that Christianity originated in a divine intervention in human affairs. It equally excludes the liberal-Christian view that Jesus was a unique teacher who founded Christianity by God-given genius. As Kazhdan recognizes in his review, I reject both these positions. But whether a crucified claimant to Messiahship bearing the common Jewish name of Jesus, contributed some element to the legend of Jesus Christ is a question on which one may come to a positive or negative conclusion without prejudice to the materialist conception of history.

Kazhdan himself admits that "there were so many pseudo-Messiahs (Christs) in Judaea during the first century AD that a Jesus could have been among them." A historical Jesus Christ, then, was possible. The only question is, was he actual? And that is a question of evidence.

I do not say that the two references in Josephus are proofs. One is plainly a forgery; the other might be, though I think this improbable. All I contend is that the "silence of Josephus" apart from these two references does not disprove the existence of a historical Jesus Christ. The question remains open.

As to Justus of Tiberias, in whose work Photius in the ninth century found no mention of Jesus Christ, what exactly did he write? Apparently a *Chronicle of the Jewish Kings* from Moses to Agrippa II,[48] and a *War of the Jews* in which he attacked Josephus, and for

[48] Paul Louis Couchoud, *The Enigma of Jesus*, trans. Winifred Whale (London: Watts & Co., 1924), 23.

which Josephus attacked him. In a chronicle of Jewish kings there would be no occasion to mention Jesus, since there was no king in his time; and in a history of the Jewish war the question would not arise. In any case, Jesus was not so important to Justus as to Photius.

I come now to positive evidence. Kazhdan takes exception to my referring to the Talmud, since it "was compiled between the third and fifth centuries from oral tradition." True! But in dealing with tradition the scientific historian has to ask not only "What is its date?" but also "If it was invented, why was it invented?" In most of the Talmudic references to Christianity the answer is obvious, and on p. 90 of my book I set them aside for that reason. But in the case of the story of Eliezer (pp. 90–1) the question is pertinent why any Jew, in "polemics against the Christian legend" or for any other reason, should have invented this attack on the priesthood of Jerusalem and put it in the mouth of "Jesus the Nazoraean," the hated founder of a hated sect. The Talmudists did not love the priesthood of Jerusalem. Why, then, credit the attack to a rival sectary? Why not make it their own?

But I do not say that this by itself is conclusive. My case is cumulative. There is the evidence of Tacitus. Kazhdan thinks this reliable, but suggests that the derivation of the name Christian from Christ who was executed by Pontius Pilate may be a "later falsification," or else taken by Tacitus from the Christian legend. But what is the evidence of falsification? And is it likely that Tacitus, a class-conscious Roman senator (as his whole work shows) to whom the Christians were enemies of the human race deserving of the extreme penalty, attached the smallest importance to their legends? In default of positive evidence proving this passage of Tacitus to be a forgery, we must take it on its merits. It has always seemed to me a stumbling-block in the way of the undiluted myth theory of Christian origins.

I come now to early Christian documents. Kazhdan reproaches me with ignoring Engels's dating of the Apocalypse in AD 68–9. We Marxists are not Papists and are not committed to the *ipsissima verba* of Marx and Engels. Does it detract from the

greatness of Marx that in 1850 he told the workers that they had to go through "fifteen, twenty, fifty years" of struggle before winning power,[49] whereas we know that it was not even fifty, but sixty-seven years from 1850 to the October Revolution? And does it detract from the greatness of Engels that he accepted a date for the Apocalypse which had the authority of the Tübingen School but has not been accepted by most later critics? Not that Engels was wholly in error. There are parts of the Apocalypse which refer to circumstances of the Jewish War and must be dated at that time. I accept this in my book (pp. 140–2). But there are other passages which refer to the reign of Domitian and the emperor-worship which he enforced (pp. 154–5). The final compilation, then, belongs to the later date. In any case, since I attribute the book to one author (p. 154) and he wrote some of it in the time of the Jewish War, the point is hardly worth labouring.

Kazhdan is not quite correct in saying that I treat the Synoptic gospels as the oldest Christian documents. I assign that place to parts of the Pauline Epistles (pp. 107–24). Nevertheless I give reasons for my view that the primary source of the Synoptic Gospels dates from about AD 70 (pp. 83–7) and Kazhdan should not call those reasons "arbitrary" unless he can demolish them.

I confess I am not convinced by the reason given by Godospeed for rejecting the existence of any written Gospel before the end of the first century. If the word "remember" used in the Clementine Epistle is to be taken as proof that the author knew only oral tradition, then the words, "Remember Lot's wife," in Luke xvii, 32, are proof that the story of that petrified lady, too, was oral tradition! But the legend is written down in Genesis.

However, Kazhdan does not rate this argument so important as that of Knox, based on Marcion. Knox's contention is that in the restored text of Marcion's Gospel 61.5 per cent of the verses are similar to matter in the Synoptic Gospels (other than Luke), whereas

[49] Editors: Robertson cites only a letter vaguely. For an up-to-date reference to this quote, see Karl Marx's words in "Meeting of the Central Authority September 15, 1850," Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *Collected Works*, vol. 10 (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 2010), 626.

in those parts of Luke which are not in Marcion only 20.3 per cent are found in the other Synoptics. Why, then, should Marcion prefer matter which was not original to Luke? Surely the answer leaps to the eye. Marcion, as Kazhdan correctly says, believed that he was restoring the original Gospel. Naturally, therefore, he preferred those parts of Luke which had some support in the other Synoptics, and rejected matter which he believed that Luke had faked himself. Especially, of course, Marcion rejected matter offensive to him on doctrinal grounds, such as the nativity and infancy stories in Luke. There is nothing wonderful here. Moreover, Tertullian in his work against Marcion (iv, 4) explicitly says that Marcion in his *Antitheses* argued that the Gospel attributed to Luke was interpolated by Judaizers. Marcion, then, knew Luke. Unless we gratuitously accuse Tertullian of misquotation from a work easily accessible in his day, we cannot lightly set this evidence aside.

Kazhdan is mistaken in saying that Justin does not mention the Gospels. On the contrary, he explicitly refers to "the records made by the apostles, which are called Gospels," as his source for the institution of the eucharist.[50] As for Celsus's statement that Christians rewrote the Gospel "three times, four times, many times," that is just what happened, and I claim in my book to show how it happened.

As to "proving that Paul, Peter, and the other apostles actually lived," myth must end and history begin somewhere. The question is where. At a certain point in history we find Christian churches in being and Christian writings extant of which no one denies the authenticity. Where are we to fix that point? Is it not somewhat arbitrary to say: "From a point in the second century—say the time of Justin—onward there is history and there are real people; before that point there is only myth, and nobody we read of really lived"? If we dismiss Paul, Peter, and the other apostles as mythical, by what right do we concede historicity to Papias, who in the second century, in his quest for reliable tradition, asked older men than himself "what Andrew, Peter, Philip, Thomas, James, John, Matthew, or any other

[50] *Apology* I, 66. Editors: Justin Martyr, *First Apology* 66 in modern citation.

of the Lord's disciples had said"?[51] Was Papias asking about mythical people? Or was he himself a myth? And if he was, what of his friend Polycarp, and Polycarp's pupil Irenaeus? We have to descend to history somewhere; and I have yet to be convinced that the second century is a safer landing-ground than the first.

Kazhdan contends that I wrongly derive Christianity from Judaism to the exclusion of Greek and Roman popular cults, Platonism, Stoicism, and so forth. I think I do justice in my book (p. 43, pp. 68–72, pp. 98–9) to the influence of these factors. If I do not assign them a place co-equal with Judaism, it is for a definite reason. The historian has not only to trace the sources of the ideology of Christianity; that is the easiest part of his task. He has to also explain why Christianity seemed so dangerous to the Graeco-Roman ruling class that they resorted again and again to savage repression. The persecuting emperors (with the one exception of Nero) were not maniacs. They were sane and, according to ruling-class estimates, even liberal men. They did not persecute Platonism or Stoicism[52] or the Greek *thiasos* or, as a general rule, the Roman *collegia*. But they did persecute Christianity. Why? The very name gives the answer. Christians were partisans of a Christ, a Jewish Messiah, a rebel against Caesar. That is why it is in the Jewish background, rather than in the Greek or Roman background, that the chief key (though not the only one) to Christian origins has to be sought.

The same reason explains why I postulate a revolutionary side to early Christianity. If the Christian cult had no revolutionary associations, why did enlightened emperors persecute it? This question is really quite independent of the historicity of Jesus. I could, for the sake of argument, relegate Jesus wholly (as I already do in great part) to the region of myth, and still have to answer the question why men like Trajan and Marcus Aurelius had Christians thrown to beasts in the arena. They were sane men. They cannot really have thought that the empire was in danger if an insignificant slave at

[51] Eusebius III, 39, 4. Editors: Eusebius, *Historia Ecclesiastica* 3.39.4 in modern citation.

[52] Domitian banished philosophers from Rome; but this was soon reversed.

Antioch or Lyons refused to drop a pinch of incense on the fire before their statue. Why, then, did they persecute?

Surely Marxism itself drives us to only one answer. Such severities are practised only when a ruling class conceives itself to be fighting for its existence. Christianity was persecuted because the persecutors believed it to be a conspiracy of the disinherited classes (*humiliores*) against the State. Were they justified in that belief? Yes and no! No, as far as the Pauline Christians were concerned—Paul, Clement, Polycarp, Irenaeus, and so forth. But yes, in the case of the unnamed multitude—the men and women who expected "now in this time, houses… and lands,"[53] and whose slogans were so imprinted on early Christian propaganda that all the editing in the world never quite eliminated them from the Gospels.

I readily concede to Kazhdan that these revolutionary hopes, after repeated disappointment, gradually dwindled away into "despair, humiliation and anger," and that anger must not be confused with revolutionary activity. But it took the Graeco-Roman ruling class a long time to find out that they had nothing to fear from Christianity and that it could even be useful.

I am obliged to Kazhdan for his criticism, and hope that this discussion will contribute to an understanding of the problem.

[53] Mark x, 30.

HUMANISM IN HISTORY

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The historical basis of humanism is the fact of human interdependence. A co-operative way of life is not something imposed by the grace of God, or by the fear of hell, on a race of natural Ishmaelites whose existence, left to themselves, would be "solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short." On the contrary, it is only by co-operation that man has survived. Nature may be red in tooth and claw; but man's teeth and nails are very inadequate weapons in the struggle for existence. Even the primitive hunting-horde depends on co-operation, on the pooling of effort in a common adventure, on the exchange, however rudimentary, of words and ideas, and on the transmission by the old to the young of such social habits as are necessary to survival. Much more is this so in any kind of civilized society.

It is necessary to stress this at the start; for religious propaganda asserts the exact opposite. To the religious propagandist, man without the consciousness of God and of his responsibility to God is lost. Religion alone, on this view, makes decent human relations possible; and anyone who thinks otherwise is dishonestly living on the moral capital accumulated by his ancestors in the ages of faith. The simple answer is that, whereas without mutual aid man would not have become man, there is no evidence that primitive man had anything which we could describe as religious belief. Magic preceded religion. Among the Australian primitives, says Frazer, "all men are magicians, but not one is a priest." In such societies the distinction between gods and men "has scarcely emerged." In the sense which we attach to the word, "the savage has no god at all."[54] Yet a savage society which did not practise cooperation would cease to exist.

[54] *The Golden Bough*, abridged edition, chaps. IV, VII.

When in course of time magic gave rise to religion, when the primitive magician or medicine-man had given place to a god made in his image and, like him, pictured as exerting power for the benefit of man, it was natural that the gods should be invoked to sanction traditional codes of behaviour, just as they were invoked to account for natural phenomena. In barbaric societies and in early civilizations people did not know why certain things happened or why certain things had to be done. To explain such things they told stories or myths.

No doubt, as Jane Harrison says, the first myths were the verbal accompaniment of something that had to be done hunting, ploughing, sowing, or whatever it was. They keyed you up to do the job and told you, if you needed telling, why you had to do it. In later times, when knowledge had increased and the magicians or medicine-men now evolved into full-blown priest-kings had studied the apparent motions of the heavenly bodies and knew perfectly well why ploughing, sowing, and the rest of it had to be done at certain times and not at others, the myths were still kept up as a source of temple revenue and as a sanction for codes of law in which the prestige of the priesthood was the first consideration. Thus Hammurabi of Babylon could ascribe his code of laws to the sun-god, Shamash, though none knew better than the king himself that, except as the giver of light by which the scribes did their job, the sun had played no part in the codification.

By such pious deceptions the illusion was perpetuated that the social order with its priests, peasants, merchants, and slaves was sanctioned by the natural order with its heaven above, earth beneath, and water under the earth, and that anyone omitting to pay his dues to the priest might justly be suspected of designs on his neighbour's house, wife, man-servant, maidservant, ox, ass, or anything else that was his. Thousands of years have passed; and men have changed their way of living and the names of their gods; but the illusion persists to this day.

The historic task of humanism is negative and positive—negatively, to combat the idea that human values (truth, beauty, and goodness) rest on a supernatural basis; and positively, to exhibit their real basis in human interdependence. The battle began when Greek philosophers, confronted by the conflicting myths of their own country and of Egypt and Babylonia, ceased to explain natural phenomena by stories of gods which no one could check, and began to explain them by theories based at least to some extent on facts of experience. Their attempts failed partly because they had not the experimental apparatus necessary to put their theories to the proof, and partly because, however credibly they might explain natural phenomena, a society made up of opposing classes of rich and poor, freemen and slaves, could not do without myth or face any serious analysis of itself.

Protagoras, for example, extending to society the reasoning which older philosophers had applied to the external world, advanced such propositions as that man was the measure of all things, that there were two sides to every question, that the soul was nothing apart from the senses, and that the gods were unknowable. To modern humanists these are commonplaces. We know that feeling and thinking are ways in which we react to our environment, and we have no reason to think that our organs of thought could ever reveal to us such entities as soul (in any sense other than a sum of mental states) or God (in any sense distinct from the universe about us).

But these were dangerous thoughts to Greek citizens who had been brought up on Homer and Hesiod, who could see only one side of a question when their city's traditions or interests were concerned, and who believed the gods of Greece at any rate to be knowable and indispensable to public order. And they are still dangerous thoughts to Europeans and Americans brought up on the Bible and Catechism, who have been taught that it is their duty to see only one side of a question when the Christian faith or the authority of their spiritual pastors and masters is concerned, and who believe that, whatever may be the case with other religions, their own is as true and as indispensable to Western civilization as the multiplication table.

A century later Epicurus sought a basis for social obligation independent of supernatural sanctions. To do full justice to his formulation we must remember the time at which he wrote. The Greek experiment in freedom, vitiated from the start by its slave basis, had faltered and failed. Greek cities were now mere municipalities in Alexander's empire; and the dynastic wars of his successors were making life insecure from one end of the Greek world to the other.

Faced by this situation, Epicurus lays down that the end of all action is freedom from pain and fear, bodily or mental, and that social behaviour is necessary to this end. The only reason for seeking wealth and power, says Epicurus—obviously thinking of the dynasts of his day—is to win security. But in fact greatness does not confer the security at which it aims; therefore it is self-defeating. Justice is relative to human society a code, varying with time and place, devised for the prevention of mutual injury. Its ultimate sanction is the insecurity which dogs the delinquent through life. "The just man enjoys the greatest peace of mind, while the unjust is full of the utmost disquietude."[55] Friendship is the surest road to happiness and security. We should therefore make as many friends and as few enemies as possible, and not fight our enemies, but avoid them.

The Epicurean school has been well described as a "Society of Friends with a system of natural philosophy as its intellectual core."[56] From a practical point of view its gospel of contentment with little, of detachment and withdrawal from the struggle for wealth and power, has more affinity with Christianity than most Christians are willing to acknowledge, and is warranted to waken a responsive chord in all who at any time are at the mercy of social and political forces which they are unable to control.

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[55] Diogenes Laertius X, 144.

[56] Farrington, *Science and Politics in the Ancient World*, chap. XII.

Yet Epicureanism has one grave practical weakness. It appeals in the last resort only to those who prefer peace of mind to storm and stress. It has nothing to say to the born gambler or the born fighter, and can only turn its back on the turmoil of the time. It ignores the objective fact of human interdependence, which could have provided Epicurus with a ground for his preference of friendship to enmity. And it is easy to see a reason for the omission. True interdependence exists only among those engaged in cooperative activity. Now the Greeks to whom Epicurus addressed his philosophy were not engaged in co-operative activity, nor necessarily in any activity at all. Productive work was more and more relegated to slaves; and though slaves were admitted to the Epicurean school, they were not typical members. Writing for people most of whom were one-sidedly dependent on slave labour, Epicurus could not give his ethic its real basis in human interdependence, and was reduced to a subjective preference of a quiet to an adventurous life.

The Stoics, up to a point, can be reckoned as humanists. Like the Epicureans, they sought a basis for conduct not in the supernatural, but in the nature of things. All living things seek self-preservation; man's special means of self-preservation is reason; therefore, for man, life according to reason is life according to nature. The rational man, or he who perceives things as they are, is alone free and capable of the good life; all others are foredoomed to mutual enmity and slavery.

So much could have been said by any Epicurean; the divergence between the two systems is mainly one of emphasis. But the Stoics differed crucially from the Epicureans in the ease with which they accommodated their philosophy to the established religion. By a few verbal compromises, by identifying reason with nature and calling it God or Zeus or Fate, the Stoic could go through all the motions of a pious pagan without believing a word of the official myths just as many moderns contrive to be comfortable in the Established Church of their country without taking literally any of the historic creeds. Consequently, while the Stoics under the Roman

Empire can claim credit for many humane reforms, as propagandists of humanism they were a failure.

The Triumph of Christianity

In fact, in a society based on slavery it is impossible to popularize humanism. Institutions for which there is no rational justification cannot live without myth. Christianity conquered because in the circumstances of the declining Roman Empire it was the myth fittest to survive.

Gibbon's analysis of the reasons in his famous fifteenth chapter, if we make due allowance for his eighteenth-century limitations and neglect of the economic background, is still surprisingly valid. He rightly points out that the Christians, like the Jews before them, were animated by an intolerant zeal against paganism, which they held to be not only false, but diabolic; and that from that zeal they drew a strength which carried them to victory. But (and this Gibbon does not see) their zeal would have profited them nothing if it had not answered to a widespread hatred among the Mediterranean masses for the Empire which enslaved and exploited them, and of which paganism was the official religion.

It is significant that the least zealous, and the readiest to absorb pagan mythology and to compromise with pagan practice, were the Gnostics, "the most polite, the most learned and the most wealthy of the Christian name."[57] Again, Gibbon rightly points out that belief in the imminent end of the present world and in the advent of a miraculous millennium, which finds expression in the canonical Apocalypse and in many other writings of the kind, must have won many converts to Christianity. What he omits to add is that such beliefs (and the related belief in the fiery doom of pagan civilization, with which he makes malicious play) could have taken root only among people driven to millennial dreams by the appalling misery incidental to empire-building in the ancient world—so appalling that apocalyptic writers could find no fitter emblem for their conquerors

[57] *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, chap. XV.

than a succession of carnivorous beasts, each more terrible than the last.

Gibbon justly stresses the universality of belief in miracles among the early Christians, in contrast to the "latent and even involuntary scepticism" with which even the most pious of his contemporaries would meet similar stories. This, as he sees, is merely to say that the ancient world was less informed about the order of nature and more "prepared to sustain the visible action of the Deity" than the scientific eighteenth century.[58]

Gibbon next refers to the ascetic morals of the early Church a natural reaction, he might have added, against the licence inevitable in a slave society. Finally he correctly emphasizes the Church's activity as a friendly society disbursing benefits with which the Empire after the second century could no longer compete, electing its officers by popular vote long after democracy had vanished elsewhere in the Graeco-Roman world, and enforcing its rules by a discipline which made it a formidable State within the State. With it the Empire had either to fight to a finish or to come to terms.

The rule is for Christian preachers and writers to stress the supernatural basis of ethics. True, their teaching is not uniform. They are human; and humanity keeps breaking through. Even in the Pauline Epistles, the fountain-head of the doctrine of salvation by faith, we read of "Gentiles who have no law" doing "by nature the things of the law,"[59] and of *agape* "charity," "love," or as I should like to render it, "comradeship" being a greater virtue than faith or hope.[60] In the Johannine Epistles we get one flash of pure humanism: "He that loves not his brother, whom he has seen, cannot love God, whom he has not seen."[61] But such texts are not the rock on which the Church is built. From the day when the Empire became Christian, General Council after General Council was convened for the purpose, not of applying such teaching as this, but of deciding the exact

[58] *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, chap. XV.
[59] Rom. 2:14–15.
[60] 1 Cor. 13.
[61] 1 John 4:20.

relation between the Father and the Son, and between the divine and human natures in Jesus Christ.

Whatever the Epistles or even the Gospels might say, it was infinitely more important to hold the Catholic faith whole and undefiled, neither confounding the Persons nor dividing the Substance, than to feed the hungry, house the homeless, clothe the naked, or visit the sick. The Church had become an instrument of government, indeed a partner in it, and had no further need of the millennial dreams which had carried her to power.

The Humanist Revival

Nothing that can be called humanism emerges until the end of the Middle Ages. We cannot dignify by that name the religious indifference of the emperor Frederick II, who, while quarrelling with the Pope and believing no more in Christianity than in Judaism or Islam, nevertheless did the dirty work of the Church and replenished his own coffers by sending heretics to the stake. As to the heretical sects themselves, recruited as they were from the poor and unlearned, they could only point out what was perfectly true—that the Catholic Church had been false to its principles, and fight the official mythology by a counter-myth based on the only text-book they had, the reputedly infallible Bible.

The revival of humanism was a by-product of the opening up of eastern trade which began with the Crusades. Western Europe, and above all the cities of Italy, were thereby brought into direct contact with the Greek as well as the Moslem East. The mariner's compass seems to have found its way to Europe at that time. Later on, as the Osmanli Turks mastered what was left of the Byzantine Empire, two results followed. Western merchants had to recoup themselves for the loss of the caravan trade by finding maritime routes to further Asia: this ushered in the age of discovery.

Greek scholars, even before the fall of Constantinople in 1453, began to migrate to Italy and to make the classics of their country known in the West: this led to a new study of the human past.

The discovery of the world and the discovery of man (in Burckhardt's immortal phrase) are the two factors which made up what we call the Renaissance, and which in different ways suggested the possibility of a full human life independent of religious belief.

The word "humanism" in connection with the Renaissance connotes primarily an interest in ancient literature and art, and does not necessarily exclude belief in the supernatural. Nevertheless the Italian humanists were forerunners of humanism in the wider and deeper sense. To hold up to admiration the achievements of pagan antiquity was to admit that men who did not glorify the true God had something to show for themselves other than the vile passions, reprobate mind, and other vices imputed to them by the apostle, and thereby to abandon an important part of the traditional case for Christianity. To treat Homer and Plato as worthier of study than the lives of the saints, and the deities of Olympus as no less fit subjects for the artist than Madonnas and martyrs, was to say that truth, beauty, and goodness had existed outside the Church, and to make it difficult to maintain the dogma of exclusive salvation.

The religious Reformation was a direct result of the revival of learning. It was essentially a revolt of the laity of Western Europe and above all of the middle class enriched by trade and enlightened by the printing-press—against the exactions of a Catholic hierarchy whose pretensions were not noticeably supported by superior holiness or superior learning, and especially against a Papacy which had become a mere Italian racket. Naturally the revolt went further in northern countries, whose slender resources made clerical impositions less bearable, than in countries further south, where life was easier and the burden less felt. Thus Scandinavia, Scotland, and Holland threw out popery neck and crop. England compromised by setting up a Church which professed and still professes (not very plausibly) to be both Catholic and Protestant. Germany was split between the Lutheran north and the Catholic south. France remained Catholic only after a fiercely fought struggle, which left behind an undercurrent of scepticism that was to have its revenge later on. In Italy, where the Papacy was a homemade institution and every rich

family hoped to see one of its sons in the papal chair, and in Spain, where Catholicism was linked with memories of a great national struggle, the Reformation had no chance, and any feeble revolt was soon crushed by the Inquisition.

But whether the Reformation took a Lutheran, a Calvinist, or an Anglican form, whether the prince led his people or the people pushed their prince, it could not directly promote humanism, and that for a very simple reason. To fight Rome the Reformers, like the earlier medieval heretics, drew their ammunition from the only arsenal they had the Bible. It was therefore tactically dangerous for them to allow criticism of the Bible or of the supernatural view of the world which it presupposes.

The Birth of Modern Science

The other great factor in the genesis of modern humanism, the discovery of the world, led directly to the beginnings of modern science. Ocean navigation gave a new impetus to the study of astronomy and drew attention to the flaws in the accepted Ptolemaic system. The cautious revival by Copernicus of the ancient Greek hypothesis of the motion of the earth was not regarded by him or by his immediate contemporaries as incompatible with the established religion. His work *On the Revolution of the Heavenly Bodies* was in fact published with the encouragement of the Vatican and dedicated to Pope Paul III. It was the use made of the Copernican theory by others, particularly by Giordano Bruno, which convinced Rome of its danger.

Bruno saw that the abandonment of geocentric astronomy discredited once for all any cosmology based on the authority of Church or Bible. Hailing Copernicus as greater than the discoverers of new continents, he revives the old Epicurean doctrine of a plurality of worlds in infinite space, combines with it the Stoic identification of God and nature, develops a pantheism anticipatory of Spinoza and Hegel, and even forecasts the Darwinian theory of natural selection. But Bruno makes it clear that these are doctrines for the few. He

favours religion as a moral discipline for the many, if only theologians will grant freedom to philosophers—which was just what neither Rome nor Geneva would allow.[62]

The Roman cardinals were no fools. They knew what sort of an egg Luther had hatched from Erasmus' laying, and they guessed what sort of a crop would grow from Bruno's sowing. "Perhaps it is with more fear that you pass sentence on me than I receive it," he told the inquisitors who sent him to the stake. He had taken their measure.

These different streams—the discovery of the world and the discovery of man, religious Reformation and renascent science—converged in Elizabethan England. Her mariners fought Spain for the freedom of the ocean highways; her poets created a literature that outdid the Greek and Latin classics; and her thinkers looked forward to a new age of power and plenty. Bruno was in England from 1583 to 1585, knew Sir Philip Sidney and other eminent Elizabethans, and dedicated one of his works to him. Through Sidney he influenced Edmund Spenser there are echoes of Bruno in the *Faery Queen*—and perhaps Sir Walter Raleigh and Francis Bacon. Common hatred of Spain and the Papacy made these men receptive of Bruno's ideas. Despite official conformity to the established religion, the whole interest of the great Elizabethans is in human life here and now; indeed Protestantism tended at its left edge to pass by a natural process into a rejection of authority which detractors called "atheism," but which probably went no further than deism.

Pioneers of Humanism

The "atheism" imputed to Raleigh (for which he was never indicted) probably amounted to no more than this. No doubt his steady advocacy in Parliament of toleration for ultra-Protestant sects persecuted by the government added to his ill odour: to sixteenth-century rulers tolerance spelt indifference. There is true humanism in that passage in *A History of the World* where Raleigh apostrophises

[62] See the two essays on Giordano Bruno by Thomas Whittaker, *The Metaphysics of Evolution*.

death as the leveller who makes kings and princes, the rich and great of the earth, equal with beggars.

> It is he that puts into man all the wisdom of the world without speaking a word; which God with all the words of his Law, promises or threats, doth not infuse…
>
> 'O eloquent, just, and mighty Death! whom none could advise, thou hast persuaded;… thou hast drawn together all the far-stretched greatness, all the pride, cruelty, and ambition of man, and covered it all over with these two narrow words, *Hic jacet*!

But unless the lines written before his execution were wholly insincere he must have believed in personal immortality.[63]

Raleigh's friend, Christopher Marlowe, was more aggressive. Not only had he too the reputation of an atheist in his lifetime, but a warrant was out for him when he met his violent end in 1593. He uses his "mighty line" wholly to hymn secular achievement, above all when its authors—like Marlowe himself and like Elizabethan England—start from small beginnings and defy fearful odds. Tamburlaine, a shepherd, proves himself a lord by deeds. Faustus, a poor student (mythical embodiment of the new learning which was shattering the old orthodoxy) wins by forbidden knowledge

> A world of profit and delight
> Of power, of honour, of omnipotence.

God is introduced only as an odious tyrant who like the Church in Marlowe's day—treats the quest for knowledge as meriting eternal damnation. The last speech of Faustus, in form the lament of a lost soul, is in fact a searing indictment of orthodox theology. The devils who carry him off are stage machinery to tickle the ears of the

[63] "But from this earth, this grave, this dust, / My God shall raise me up, I trust."

groundlings. In the glorification of knowledge and power, and in the lines on the beauty of Helen, the true Marlowe speaks.

There has been endless debate about the religion of Shakespeare, as about everything else connected with him.[64] Nothing is gained by trying to read the poet's sentiments in those of his men and women who merely speak in character. Shakespeare is not to be judged a Christian because Richard II in self-pity compares his betrayal to that of Christ (and makes his own the harder case!); or because Hamlet, a prince religiously brought up, believes in heaven and hell and has scruples about suicide. Still less is Shakespeare to be judged a Catholic because the Ghost alludes to purgatory. But when he puts into the mouth of a character words quite unnecessary in the context, we may fairly ask why. Such are Prospero's words in *The Tempest*:

> We are such stuff
> As dreams are made on; and our little life
> Is rounded with a sleep.

There is no dramatic reason for Prospero to say this. His speech is complete without the words. Indeed, the whole passage delays the action which he has just remembered he has to take soon against Caliban's conspiracy to kill him. The natural explanation is that Shakespeare through Prospero here expresses himself. On religion, then, he is more sceptical than Raleigh, though not so fierce as Marlowe.

Still more evidently is Bacon a pioneer of modern humanism. He did as much as in that age he safely could to free science from the fetters of theology—arguing that to seek other than natural causes for natural phenomena was "nothing else but to offer to the Author of truth the unclean sacrifice of a lie."[65] If he refuses to believe "that this

[64] I pass over as a literary curiosity the theory that Marlowe was not killed, but survived to write the plays of Shakespeare.
[65] *Advancement of Learning*, book 1.

universal frame is without a mind,"[66] he nevertheless takes the first step towards reducing God to a constitutional monarch who reigns, but does not govern. By mastering the laws of matter in motion Bacon hopes to "produce worthy effects, and endow the life of man with infinite commodities."[67] Marx and Engels call him "the real progenitor of English materialism," though his doctrine "pullulates with inconsistencies imported from theology."[68] These need surprise no one who considers his timid nature and the delicacy of his position at the courts of Elizabeth I and James I. The greatest stain on his reputation is his abject truckling to James in the matter of the burning of Bartholomew Legate in 1611.

The men of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries were hampered on the road to humanism by living under governments which treated attacks on religion as dangerous to order. Even in the relatively tolerant Dutch Republic, Spinoza had to wrap up his essential materialism in the language of theism; and even so his major works saw the light only after his death. His contemporaries were not deceived: in his lifetime and for a century later Spinoza was reputed an atheist. It was left for the muddled romantic Novalis to be taken in by the trappings and to dub Spinoza a "God-intoxicated man"—an opinion much sillier than that of the Dutch Calvinists who had banned his books.

The Failure of Deism

The emergence of humanism as a militant ideology was a consequence of the struggle waged in the eighteenth century by the French bourgeoisie against the clergy and nobility who, behind a facade of absolute monarchy, stood between them and political power. The established order rested theoretically on two doctrines—that kings ruled by the grace of God, and that bishops (with the Pope

[66] Essay on *Atheism*.
[67] Letters 1.123.
[68] *The Holy Family*.

at their head) were the divinely commissioned successors of the apostles.

These doctrines could be refuted in two alternative ways. One—that taken by the English and Scottish Puritans of the seventeenth century—was to prove from the Bible that kings and bishops had not the divine right claimed for them. This was easy, since the Bible is a mass of contradictory writings—revolutionary poems and pamphlets among the rest—and by selective quotation can be made to prove anything. But it was inconclusive, since texts about binding kings with chains and nobles with fetters of iron could always be balanced by warnings that the powers that be are ordained of God and that they who resist shall receive to themselves damnation. The other way—that taken by the French *philosophes* of the eighteenth century—was to prove that no right was divine, for the simple reason that there was no God, or that if there was, he had revealed nothing to man about rights or anything else.

And that was the conclusion to which the evidence pointed. In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries physical science went from strength to strength—verifying and completing the Copernican astronomy by the discoveries of Galileo and the gravitational theory of Newton, adding to its mathematical arsenal the weapons of analytical geometry and the calculus, explaining the tides, accounting for planetary irregularities, and determining the figure of the earth. All the phenomena of matter in motion suggested the reign of law and excluded the idea of miracle. Even if God must be assumed as the First Cause—as most thinkers were still disposed to do—what reason was there to believe that the First Cause took any special interest in the doings of man, or had commissioned kings to bear the sword or Popes to bind and loose?

Indeed, critical philosophy soon demolished the reasons for belief in a First Cause. If, as John Locke showed, our knowledge is derived wholly from experience, we can know nothing beyond the natural world in which we live and move and have our being. Jean Jacques Rousseau might argue in popular language, and Immanuel Kant in learned language, that belief in God and in a life to come,

though indemonstrable, was a moral necessity; but this ghost of a God was a survival not of the fittest. People were not visibly more moral for believing in a Supreme Being. After serving, in the otherwise beneficent French Revolution, the dubious purpose of convincing Robespierre that atheists were better headless, deism ceased to be a living force, and the two protagonists, Christianity and atheistic humanism, were left face to face.

The Utilitarian

The classical formulation of humanism in the early nineteenth century was the Utilitarian philosophy of Jeremy Bentham and the two Mills. Utilitarianism, if not explicitly atheistic, is implicitly so. Bentham's formula, "the greatest happiness of the greatest number," assumes human happiness as the sole criterion of conduct and ignores what the Church calls our "duty towards God." Bentham was a declared atheist. John Stuart Mill towards the end of his life admitted the theoretical possibility of a good, but not omnipotent God, but drew from it no practical consequences. Orthodox theism he uncompromisingly rejects. "I will call no being good, who is not what I mean when I apply that epithet to my fellow-creatures; and if such a being can sentence me to hell for not so calling him, to hell I will go."[69]

The weakness of the Utilitarians lay in their abstract treatment of happiness and in their assumption that different kinds were commensurable. The word "happiness" is in fact a label which we affix to many sorts of satisfaction—food and drink, good health, the love of family and friends, the indulgence of luxury, creative activity, the contemplation of beauty and truth. What yardstick can measure the happiness which a hungry man gets from a meal; a sick man from recovery; friends, lovers, parents and children from one another; a moneyed man from a new car; an artist from painting; a musician from composing; a scientist from research; or the rest of us from the results of their work?

[69] *Examination of Sir William Hamilton's Philosophy*, chap. VII.

This impasse reveals the limitations under which the Utilitarians laboured. They dealt with people in the abstract—with equal citizens each counting for one and none for more than one. In the concrete, people are not like that. At the very time when the Utilitarians sought to reduce ethics and politics to one simple formula the Industrial Revolution, first in Britain, then in France and other countries, was herding masses of underfed and precariously employed men, women and children into the new factories and creating problems of which antiquity and the Middle Ages had never dreamt. To the factory-owners and most intellectuals of that time "the greatest happiness of the greatest number" meant *laissez-faire*—the freedom of every man to seek his own advantage with no more external interference than was necessary to protect life and property. But to the workers, who after all were "the greatest number," it meant (once they awoke to their situation) the formation of trade unions to protect their interests, and of political parties to force State interference in their favour. Mill, the greatest of the Utilitarians, was aware of this and showed it in the progressive abandonment of *laissez-faire* in his later writings.

Marx and Engels begin where the Utilitarians leave off. For man in the abstract, seeking abstract happiness, they substitute man in the concrete "freemen and slave, patrician and plebeian, lord and serf, guild-master and journeyman,"[70] or in modern society capitalist and worker (including in the last the black-coated professions)—each seeking from labour, his own or that of others, the income by which he must live. They held that need of the workers for a living wage and the need of the capitalists for a level of income customary in their class are necessities not to be measured by a common yardstick. On this view life settles the matter by a ceaseless struggle manifesting itself in strikes, lockouts, and political battles, first national, then international, to end only with the conquest of political power by the workers, the expropriation of the capitalists, and the building of a

[70] *Communist Manifesto*.

society in which all are workers and "the free development of each is the condition for the free development of all."[71]

Recoil from the Consequences

That such conclusions could be drawn from Utilitarian premises led many to reject the premises altogether. The reaction had already begun before Marx and Engels appeared on the scene. Half a century before, during the French Revolution, Edmund Burke had bewailed the extinction of 'the glory of Europe' by the meddling of "sophisters, economists, and calculators"[72] in political affairs, and had denounced as public enemies those whose 'plans for the relief of the "Labouring Poor" "dissatisfied them with the condition which they must endure if the world were to exist."[73] A similar recoil from the practical consequences of humanism inspired the idealization of the Catholic past which took shape in the Oxford Movement, led Newman into the Church of Rome, and continues to this day to make Roman converts of enough literary distinction to have news value.

But the reaction against Utilitarianism and its progeny, Socialism, did not always take a religious form. Many (though fewer as time went on) saw in the Darwinian theory of natural selection a scientific justification of individualism. The argument was weak; for though struggle is a law of life, it is not of one kind only, and in the case of man cannot in the nature of the case be a war of all against all. Had it been so, man would not have survived to tell the tale. Combination is itself a weapon in the struggle; and if the workers improve their chances of survival by forming unions and political parties, they no more break the rules of the game than do the capitalists by supporting armies, navies, air forces and police.

Friedrich Nietzsche was at least more logical when he attacked the basic assumption of Utilitarianism that happiness was good. For him not happiness, but strength is the supreme value: life

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[71] *Communist Manifesto*.
[72] *Reflections on the Revolution in France.*
[73] *Letters on a Regicide Peace*.

is "will to power." That a few may achieve power, the many must be enslaved. That, says Nietzsche, was the secret of ancient civilization. Since then every step taken by man has been downward. Christianity began the rake's progress which ends in modern democracy and Socialism. To prevent the realization of this "universal, green-meadow happiness of the herd"[74] to avert the fatal day when "earth will have become small, and on it the last man will be hopping who makes everything small"[75]—Nietzsche calls on "free spirits" to assert their will to power.

Religion—even the Christian religion, much as Nietzsche despises it—is to be put to its proper use, which is to keep the majority contented with their condition, while a "new caste," aiming "thousands of years ahead," launch a "struggle for the dominion of the world."[76] As the struggle for existence among animals evolved man, so the struggle for power among men will evolve "superman."

No logical refutation of Nietzsche is possible. We can only say to such as he: If you hate the idea of universal happiness so much as to project a crusade against it, in the name of common sense keep your project secret. By blazoning it abroad you forewarn us; and forewarned is forearmed. An admirer of Nietzsche named Benito Mussolini boasted that it was better to be a lion for a day than a sheep for a thousand years. He and another admirer of Nietzsche, Adolf Hitler, were lions for a day to a good many people. Both are dead; and the plough has passed over their work. A live dog, or even a live sheep, is better than a dead lion.

Seventy years have passed since Nietzsche wrote *Beyond Good and Evil*. In those seventy years the issues have clarified. At the beginning of the period humanists hoped for a peaceful solution of world-problems. The intolerable evils of the first age of industrialism had been mitigated by legislation. Working men in Western countries had won the vote; and social reforms were broadening down from precedent to precedent. Economists told us that the prophecies of

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[74] *Beyond Good and Evil*, chap. 2.
[75] *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, part 1.
[76] *Beyond Good and Evil*, chap. 4.

Marx had been falsified in every particular; and Socialists, shedding their militancy, planned to carry out an operation on capitalism with the consent of the patient under an anaesthetic of Fabian permeation.

The Logic of History

As few of us studied foreign affairs, few of us—among the few was J. A. Hobson, the economist and South Place lecturer—saw the significance of the scramble for overseas concessions and colonies which accompanied, and indeed made possible, this improvement in the condition of the people at home. When the scramble and the armaments race to which it gave rise ended in world war, most of us put it down to the wickedness of the Germans—as if the average German had been consulted about it any more than we had. As a result, the statesmen who had led us into a war to end war followed it up with what proved to be a peace to end peace.

A more important result was that the weakest link in the capitalist chain—backward Russia—snapped under the strain of modern war, and that a Marxist party (whose leader, Lenin, had read Hobson to some purpose) seized power and to everybody's surprise, including their own, were able to hold it. More surprising still, when the peace to end peace had duly ended in a second world war, and the Russians after trying to contract out were forced in, not only did they confound the military experts by fighting back for four years, but in the end half Europe and the whole of China acceded to the Communist camp.

Humanists are driven, not by the logic of the schools, but by that of history, to take their stand on the concrete needs of the human species. Mankind is interdependent in no mystical sense, but in the material sense that today the co-operation of every able-bodied inhabitant of the planet is necessary to the existence of the race on tolerable terms. To any who at this time of day protest against the subordination of higher values to material welfare, the short answer is that without material welfare there would be no higher values. To adopt a simile used by Belfort Bax in the early days of the Socialist

movement, but still valid, the higher values are like the odd trick in a game of cards, which cannot be taken until six tricks have been scored. For humanists material needs—the six tricks—are basic.

The greatest of these material needs is peace, not only for the obvious reason that if we are wiped out in nuclear war there will be no future to talk about, but for the further reason that the diversion of millions of men and women from productive work to preparation for war handicaps us all in the battle against brute nature on which our survival and that of our children depend. Humanists, therefore, cannot be satisfied with a peace preserved only by the uneasy awareness of politicians that the "great deterrent" which will blow the enemy to bits will blow them to bits as well, nor with a statesmanship which brags of its ability to lead its people again and again to the brink of war without going over. Humanism unequivocally demands, not only peaceful coexistence among nations regardless of ideology, but the progressive dismantling of the means of destruction and the transfer of the labour wasted on them to tasks of construction.

Peace once assured, the question whether this or that economic and political system is the fittest to supply our needs can be left to the test of practice. Of one thing we can be sure: the satisfaction of man's material needs will lead to no atrophy of the higher faculties. Success in the battle for life depends on our ability to work together, on the efficiency of our tools, on our education in the why and wherefore, and on a cultured use of leisure to keep us in physical and mental health. It calls, therefore, for the utmost output of whatever moral, intellectual, and artistic activity we can mobilize. The Utilitarian world, which haunted Nietzsche like a nightmare, needs for its building, and maintenance when built, just the heroic qualities which he feared that it would extinguish. To evoke those qualities and to combat, tooth and nail, every false fear, every false loyalty, and every false religion which inhibits their exercise is the job of atheistic humanism.

WHY BE COMMUNIST?

Originally published in *The Daily Worker* (28 June 1956): 2

Many who read Michael Seaton's letter must have felt that, if he were right, there ought be no Communist Party at all. After all, why are we Communists? As I understand it, we are in the Communist Party because we want Socialism; because the Labour Party leaders have laid down that no weapon is legitimate but Parliamentary democracy, and because we have seen with our own eyes that Parliamentary democracy nowhere leads to Socialism but at most to a "mixed economy" in which monopoly capitalists hold the key positions and exploitation still goes on. If we are wrong, as Seaton thinks, and Parliamentary democracy is, after all, the right road to Socailism, why did he ever leave the Labour Party? I, anyway, am for getting Socialism how we can.

Archibald Robertson
Oxford.

LENIN'S TESTAMENT

Originally published in *The New Statesman and Nation* 52, no. 1326 (11 August 1956): 162

Sir,—If a man who signs his name may for once intervene in this riot of anonymous "Marxists," "Communards" and what have you, may I say that I for one never doubted the existence of the document foolishly called "Lenin's Testament"? But—and many probably felt the same—I couldn't have cared less what Lenin had or hadn't said about Stalin, nor did I see—nor do I now—that we in Britain were under any obligation to care.

In short, I and many others put Socialism first all the time.

Archibald Robertson
53 Victoria Road, Oxford

RESERVE JUDGMENT

Originally published in *The Daily Worker* (23 November 1956): 2

May I express my agreement with, and gratitude for, the general line taken by the Party and the Daily Worker on present events? Your critics attribute that line to fear of "offending Soviet susceptibilities."

I do not for a moment believe that to be the case, and can think of a much better reason. It is the duty of a Socialist to defend socialism. To attack the two greatest Socialist States existing—the USSR and China—is not to defend Socialism, but to help and comfort the enemy. You quite correctly do not lend yourself to such attacks.

But this rule has a corollary. When differences arise among foreign comrades, we should reserve judgment and not take sides, unless and until the intervention of our common enemy forces us to do so.

I am, therefore, glad to see that in the present controversy between Pravda and Tito, you confine yourselves to objectively reporting the facts. To take sides here would be to repeat the mistake we made in 1948. Let the foreign comrades argue it out, and let us be fair to both. Whatever happens, the Party must keep together. To leave, as some have done,[77] is to betray Socialism, to betray peace, to betray mankind.

Archibald Robertson
Oxford.

[77] Editors: This is a clear reference to the discontent among some of his contemporaries. At this time Christopher Hill was becoming an issue, and he would end up leaving the party in 1957 because he vainly could not handle one of his reports not being published and his vague and loose concerns with "democracy." Hill evidently had no conception of Democratic Centralism. The exodus also included E. P. Thompson (who turned to revisionism), Dorothy Thompson, Rodney Hilton, Randall Swingler, John Saville, and Doris Lessing, among others.

EXPEDIENCY

Originally published in *The Daily Worker* (18 December 1956): 2

The advancement of Socialism is for Communists a "must." Non-interference is only a "may." In other words, both the first and second Soviet interventions in Hungary were matters of Socialist expediency.

The first may have been inexpedient. Yet remember, Soviet troops are in Hungary by the same right as British troops are in West Germany. So we can put a parallel case.

If a German national movement arose demanding British withdrawal from Germany, should we intervene? If Adenauer asked us to, unquestionably we should. The Soviets were asked to intervene by the Hungarian government.

Maybe they should have refused, but they were obliged to assent.

As to the second intervention, put a parallel case again. Suppose the German nationalists had driven Adenauer from office and had proceeded to lynch every German they could catch who had co-operated with the British. Should we have intervened then? Yes, and doubly quick.

Archibald Robertson
Oxford.

ROSY VIEWS OF WORLD GOVT

Originally published in *The Daily Worker* (11 April 1957): 2

Early Socialists used to define Socialism as in economics co-operative Communism, in politics international Republicanism, in religion atheistic Humanism.

We know now that this is subject to qualification. No one today thinks that the wages system can be abolished by a stroke of the pen; no one thinks national tradition can be ignored; and no one thinks we can wait for Socialism until the majority are atheists and materialists.

Yet, however devious the road may be, we Communists should keep the goal in mind if our Communism is not to degenerate into the thing called "British Socialism"—that is, into monopoly capitalism wearing a pink tie to catch votes.

In particular, we should remember our internationalism. Though we can only act where we are, and it is futile to pretend to run the earth when we are not yet running Britain, Socialism is worth little unless it sees a world community at the end of the road.

In *Revolution on East River: The Twilight of National Sovereignty* (Abelard-Schuman, 18s), James Avery Joyce optimistically sees in the present United Nations Organisation the germ of a world Government. And by world Government he does not mean, as too many do, the dictatorship of American Big Business.

He thinks that the American grip on U.N. has weakened, that the balance of power now lies with the ex-colonial countries of Asia and Africa, and that if they are supported by the Communist bloc (as they often are) Britain and America will be "left stranded high and dry."

There is plenty of good reading in the book. Particularly good is Mr. Joyce's analysis of the blunders committed by the capitalist powers in their efforts to be "tough" with Communism. This exposure is the more refreshing as Mr. Joyce, a prospective Labour

Parliamentary candidate, is not within a thousand miles of being a Communist.

His book is published in America and addressed in large measure to Americans. His contention is that American policy—not only abroad, but at home in its failure to cope with the Negro challenge—is driving ex-colonial countries to what he calls "the grim alternative proffered by the Communist system."

I think he exaggerated the extent to which U.N. (from which People's China is grotesquely excluded, and not only excluded but misrepresented by a bunch of emigres icked out of their country for their country's good) can, or could ever on its present basis, function as a world government.

U.N. is what the affiliated countries make of it; and to make it different from what it is, a strong boot needs to be applied by the peoples to the pants of those who represent them.

Thus the emergence of a world government depends, as do many other good things, on the development of the class struggle. Which, of course, is what Mr. Joyce does not say and could not have said writing where he did, and for whom he did.

Archibald Robertson

EXCERPT FROM "WHAT IS VITAL IN SHAW"

Originally published in *The Shavian* 1, no. 9 (May 1957): 13–14

[Editors: This was from a speech delivered to the Society at the National Book League on 15 June 1957.]

Central to Shaw's work is the attack on the hypocrisy which according to him pervades orthodox thinking on pretty well everything. Conventional thinking uses such terms as country, empire, and Christian civilization, to mask robbery, cruelty, and cupidity. The main business of the reformer is to discredit these "ideals," and to substitute "a genuine scientific natural history."

The influence of Shaw on his time was due to the fact that we, his contemporaries, had been brought up on exactly that spurious idealism which he attacked. We were taught to believe in Christianity, which commands us not to kill, not to resist enemies, not to lay up treasure on earth, not to judge; and at the same time we were taught to admire people whose main distinction was success in doing these very things. A society which preaches a religion, and yet treats those who take it seriously as cranks, is rotten with hypocrisy. The favourite argument against freethinkers is that if Christian faith goes, Christian morals will go. Shaw in effect answers that Christian morals in the New Testament sense have never been practised, and that Christian morals in the conventional sense are hypocritical and had much better go.

In place of the spurious idealism which deals in catchwords, Shaw puts a philosophy which says, in effect, that life is worth while only if you work for a mighty purpose which gives a sense of direction. Such a purpose is the building of a scientific society in which waste and cross-purposes are eliminated. "To be in hell is to drift; to be in heaven is to steer."

Since a purpose such as this takes up the energy of a lifetime, those pursuing it have no time for pretences of which the sole use is to dress up unendurable realities in pretty language. All aims and

interests which conflict with the integration of life by a common purpose are to be ruthlessly dismissed. “Morality can go to its father the devil”—meaning the *soi-disant* moralities that obstruct Shaw's purpose of the organization of the world for more abundant life.

Shaw has no scruples about the use of force. All States rest on force. The only question for him is whether in a given case force furthers his aim or not. Hence it was inevitable that, when Communism became a world-power, Shaw should support it. He never had any illusions about Parliamentary democracy. From the very first he treats it as a fiction which, if it can be used to organize the world he wants, is well enough, but if it cannot, may be dispensed with.

In the present state of the world the alternative to coexistence is no existence. Never was it more necessary to take hold of our destiny. Never were Shaw’s attacks on lesser loyalties more justified.

THE DREGS OF LIBERALISM

Originally published in *The Daily Worker* (15 August 1957): 2

I remember a time when Liberalism still meant something.

In the years before World War I, being a Liberal meant being against political or religious inequality, against flag-wagging jingoism, against Big Business monopoly.

True liberal leaders habitually betrayed their principles and used votes collected by these slogans to do the very things they abused the Tories of doing. But the rank-and-file Liberal—the Radical—meant what he said. He hated the Tories, and the Tories hated him.

A pamphlet now before me, *The Meaning of Freedom* (Pall Mall Press, 3s 6d), is plain proof that Liberalism no longer means anything except capitalism with a highbrow look.

Jeremiad

It is written by six contributors, with an introduction by Viscount Samuel.

The first essay, by the late Gilbert Murray, is a jeremiad over a wicked world that has brought forth two world wars, fascism, Nazism and Communism, instead of the sweetly reasonable middle-class Liberalism which Murray, in his youth, expected to permeate the earth.

Unfortunately, Murray shows no sign of even beginning to understand why it all happened. Not only so, but he lumps together Nazis, fascists and Communists as the same party under different aliases.

Great scholar though he was, he was too petulant, or perhaps insufficiently interested, to study what he attacked before he attacked it.

His Liberalism is all up in the air—a vague “enlightenment” or “idealism” that never comes down to industrial earth. No wonder

he finds "no absolute contradiction" between Liberals and Tories. In fact, he ended his life practically a Suez Tory.

The Very Rev. W. R. Matthews, Dean of St. Paul's, writes the second essay and, to do him justice, shows a better understanding than Murray of what it is all about.

Naturally, he is no Marxist. But he puts a point which might well be pondered by those who complain of the regimentation of thought" in Socialist countries.

"How should we deal with people who on religious grounds, hold that the earth is flat and found schools to propagate that view?" However much we may desire to let a thousand flowers blossom, we should agree, I think, in voting the flat-earth theory a weed. To a people building Socialism the advocacy of landlordism and capitalism is rather like flat-earth theory.

Comic Relief

Mr. Graham Hutton, the third essayist, supplies comic relief. He is very strong on the State being run by the interests of consumers, not producers—as if anyone could be a producer without being a consumer.

He tells us that in capitalist countries "the proletariat-without-property is fast disappearing," and is shocked as a "humanitarian" that Nye Began should have called the Tories "vermin."

Poor man! Let us leave him and pass on.

Victor Gollancz on "Personal Freedom" is unexceptional, if rather in the clouds. R. J. Cruickshank on "Freedom of Thought and Expression" draws useful attention to the diminishing freedom of expression in our "free" country, due to the stringent interpretation of the law of libel and to the trustification of the Press.

Of the Marquess of Reading, who brings up the rear, it is enough to say that since the book was written, he has joined the Tory Government and proved in his own person the meaninglessness of the distinction between the capitalist parties.

In *Is the Liberal West in Decline?* (Pall Mall Press, 7s 6d), Professor Hans Kohn of the City College of New York, riots in a world of his own creation in which "time" is "a dynamic and moving force" and archaeology and history open up "new dimensions of time."

Personally, I have not time for all this, except to wonder that after that Professor Kohn should have the face to accuse Marx of "a metaphysicisation of history."

After this introductory canter in the clouds, Professor Kohn descends to earth to panegyrise Western (i.e., capitalist) civilisation as the source of all that is good and to write off the rest of the world (i.e., the majority of mankind) as not "Western enough."

He pats the West on the back for having satisfied the demands of the proletariat in its own world (but are they satisfied?) and hopes that it will be able to solve the greater task of Westernising the earth.

I wonder! Did anyone say Algeria? Or Jordan? Or Oman?

Archibald Robertson

CURE FOR RACIALISM

Originally published in *The Daily Worker* (29 August 1957): 2

Of all superstitions the worst are those based on pseudo-science. They enable their holders to pose as people "in the know" and to treat others as uninformed sentimentalists.

Of such "superior" superstitions the most pernicious is racialism.

"After all," says the Kenya settler justifying his treatment of the Kokuyu, "they're only just down from the trees." The settler has heard of Darwin and claims the sanction of science for the appropriation of African land, and the police terror used to enforce it.

A good cure for any taken in by such nonsense, if willing to listen to reason, is provided by *The Race Question in Modern Science*, published by UNESCO (Sidgwick and Jackson, 17s 6d).

In it, nine writers—four American, two British, two French, one Mexican, all with scientific qualifications—examine the race superstition and blow it sky high.

The authors point out that no pure race exists. In the words of Professor Juan Comas, of Mexico, "the mixing of races has been going on since the very beginning of human life on earth."

Professor Klineburg, of Columbia University, has something useful to say on the fallacies of intelligence tests.

M. Leiris, of Paris, points out that inventions are not the exclusive work of individuals of genius, but are based on former discoveries ranging over many centuries and many countries.

All may be read with profit.

Archibald Robertson

WHAT IS WRONG WITH RUSSELL?

Originally published in *The Daily Worker* (14 November 1957): 2

> My own view on religion is that of Lucretius. I regard it as a disease born of fear and as a source of untold misery to the human race. I cannot, however, deny that it has made some contributions to civilization.

With these words Bertrand Russell opens the second chapter of *Why I am not a Christian and Other Essays on Religion and Related Subjects* (Allen and Unwin, 16s).

Engels

It is interesting to compare this estimate of religion with that of Engels. Engels wrote of "the religious swindle," called religion "the fantastic reflection of human things in the human mind," and described it as based on "a prehistoric stock of what we should today call bunk," due to low economic development and false conceptions of nature.

On the face of it the two estimates look alike. And yet there is a difference. Engels approached the matter as a sociologist and traced religion to its roots in human history.

Russell approaches it as a logician and, finding religion irrational, heaves it overboard without asking what were the material conditions that made people adopt it.

The result is that in this book a great deal of truth is mixed with a great deal of rubbish. He says with perfect justification that religion is in many ways an obstacle to human happiness, that the Vatican upholds capitalism and condemns Socialism, that Christianity has a warped attitude to sex, and that all this obscurantism rests on dogmas unsupported by evidence and often self-contradictory.

Well and good! But how did people come to swallow unsupported and self-contradictory dogmas?

Russell cannot say. He can only wring his hands over them, and wish that people would be open-minded sceptics like himself.

Yet is Russell after all so open-minded? An open mind on everything is impossible, Russell, for example, has a "down" on people who talk of righteousness or unrighteousness.

Does Russell then think that everybody should do as he likes? Of course not. He sees, like all of us, that some sorts of conduct must be encouraged and others prevented.

Once you grant that, does it make much difference whether you use the words "righteous" and "unrighteous," "just" or "unjust," "social" and "anti-social," or simply "right" and "wrong"?

The trouble with Russell is that he never gets down to causes. He tells us that "hatred and fear can, with our present psychological knowledge and our present industrial technique, be eliminated altogether from human life." Fine—but how are we to do it as long as there are hateful and fearful things in the world?

"With our present industrial technique we can, if we choose, provide a tolerable subsistence for everybody." Fine again. But I am afraid the landlord and the capitalist won't go for the asking. And when it comes to making them go, Russell is so obsessed by open-mindedness that he'd rather let them stay than do anything unkind or "intolerant."

No-Man's-Land

At least that seems to be the meaning of his lumping together Christianity and Communism as two equally obnoxious "religions." He tries to straddle the class struggle.

Vainly, for the class struggle won't be straddled. You may be on the side of the owners of the world, or you may be on the side of the workers of the world.

But if you take a seat in no-man's-land you will get nowhere and may be hurt, as Russell found when the American witch-hunters

hounded him out of a philosophical professorship at New York as an immoral man—and what else do you think? A Communist! Incredible but true.
—Archibald Robertson

THE FASCISTS FEARED HIM

Originally published in *Labour Monthly* (December 1957): 571

[Editors: This is a review of *The Modern Prince* by Antonio Gramsci]

In 1928 Mussolini's public prosecutor, demanding sentence on a thirty-seven-year-old Italian Communist said: "For twenty years we must stop that brain from working." They imprisoned him for nine years and broke his health, but did not stop his brain. At the time of his death in 1937 Antonio Gramsci left behind him a remarkable literary output, much of it written in prison under all the disadvantages attending such work.

Gramsci was born in Sardinia of poor parents and went to work at eleven. He studied, won a scholarship, went to Turin University and joined the working-class movement in opposition to the First World War. In 1921 he became a foundation member of the Italian Communist Party and in 1924, after visiting the U.S.S.R., its secretary. He fought the Fascist dictatorship in the political and industrial fields. His best testimonial was that given by the public prosecutor at his trial. His published writings, translated into English by Dr. Louis Marks, show an insight seldom rivalled into working-class strategy and tactics. The essay which gives the book its title, *The Modern Prince*, was written in prison. Just as Machiavelli in his Prince had set out to show how a statesman could conquer power from the feudalists for the rising bourgeoisie, so Gramsci sets out to show how a Communist Party can conquer power from the capitalists for the working class. He is worth reading for his wise cautions against arrogance and bureaucracy on the one hand, and against, on the other hand, letting opponents' attacks determine our policy. For dogmatists and revisionists, intellectuals and anti-intellectuals, this is a "must" book.

Archibald Robertson

THE REVOLT OF COMMON SENSE (1)

Originally published in *The New Statesman and Nation* 55, no. 1418 (1958): 636

Sir,—In your front-page article of 10 May you say that the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament is not "supported" by the Communist Party, and that the Communists "are embarrassed by the obvious retort that the Soviet Union should also abandon nuclear weapons."

In the South Midlands at least—and I have yet to learn that we are out of step with other districts—the Communist Party supported the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament from the first. As to embarrassment, no doubt we should be "embarrassed" but for the fact that the Soviet Union has with damnable iteration proposed all-round nuclear disarmament ever since nuclear weapons were invented, and has itself unilaterally suspended nuclear tests. The *Daily Worker* featured the Aldermaston March and will no doubt feature other activities of the Campaign.

I suspect that your prattle about embarrassment is designed to cover your own embarrassment that the Campaign, thought not, of course "inspired," is supported by the Communist Party. You would be very "embarrassed" if your middle-class readers smeared you with fellow-travelling.

Archibald Robertson
53 Victoria Road, Oxford

THE REVOLT OF COMMON SENSE (2)

Originally published in *The New Statesman and Nation* 55, no. 1419 (24 May 1958): 668

Sir,—In reply to your first question the Communist Party, while not advocating unilateral nuclear disarmament, wishes to unite on the broadest front those who support nuclear disarmament—whether unilaterally or by international agreement—against those who oppose nuclear disarmament altogether. Hence we support the campaign, which is not committed by its published aims to unilateral nuclear disarmament, whatever some prominent speakers may say.

Your second question is too naive. The Communist Party from its foundation—and Marxists before that—have supported all mass movements, by whomsoever started, which made for working-class solidarity. Didn't you know that?

Archibald Robertson
53 Victoria Road, Oxford

NUCLEAR WARFARE (1)

Originally published in *The Humanist* (July 1958): 29

Sir,—In the June *Humanist* Mr. G. Streeten refers to the USSR's "declared purpose of world domination." It is important that we rationalists should be factually accurate. Mr. Streeten may think the USSR seeks world domination: that is a matter of opinion. He may even have inside knowledge that they do: if so, it is his patriotic duty to make it public. But to write of "their declared purpose" forces me to ask what leader of the USSR has declared that purpose, and when, and to whom.

To save misunderstanding, I may add that I do not advocate unilateral disarmament. I prefer disarmament all round.

Archibald Robertson
Oxford.

GOD IN THE COLR WAR

Originally published in *The Humanist* (August 1958): 24–25

The humanist movement is non-political. That is to say, it does its best to be. But politicians sometimes make it very hard for us.

On June 8 Mr. Macmillan gave an address at De Pauw University, Indiana, USA. With most of it *The Humanist* is not and ought not to be concerned. But at certain points Mr. Macmillan went out of his way to identify the cause of the West (or, as he put it, "what we roughly call the free world") with the cause of supernatural religion. Speaking of the failure of the United Nations to achieve a world community, the Prime Minister said: "The attempt has foundered on the deep division in the world between two different concepts of society, of government, of man himself, and of man's relation to his Creator."

Two Camps

Later, speaking of the hopes of escaping world war, he added: "I cannot believe that a country like Soviet Russia, developing so rapidly in all the technical, scientific, and material improvements of life, will not in due course be subjected to the normal development of all civilized people, when Soviet men and women would begin to ask themselves the old questions: Who made us? Why are we here? What is the purpose of life? Is there a right and a wrong? Is there sin? Is there God?"

(I give here a conflation of the reports of the speech in *The Times* and the *Daily Worker*. *The Times* has a verbatim report, but leaves a lacuna, indicated by dots after the word "people." The *Worker* report fills the gap with the words here added.) *The Humanist*, I repeat, is not and ought not to be concerned with concepts of government. But when it comes to concepts of "man himself and of man's relation to his Creator," and to such a question as "Who made us?" and so on, we are bound to be concerned, and to protest strongly

against the Prime Minister's linkage of such issues with the political quarrel between East and West.

I do not so much mind for myself: I am not a follower of Mr. Macmillan; and he may identify the cause of the West with the flat-earth theory for aught I care. But there are right-wing rationalists who may object to being committed to the Creator and his doings and to the assumption that only Communists fail to treat them with proper respect.

Outmoded Concepts

To humanists, who discard the dogma of special creation, man is an animal of the class of mammals and the order of primates, who, unlike others of the order, has acquired an erect posture, the manual skill that goes with it, a highly convoluted brain, and a capacity for cooperation, language, and more or less abstract thinking. These are his aids to survival in the struggle for existence, just as teeth and claws are aids to the carnivore, or the high jump to the flea.

To talk of "man's relation to his Creator," if "Creator" is meant literally, is to flout the evidence of evolution. If "Creator" is used in an esoteric sense to denote an almighty and all-knowing being, assumed to be behind the whole evolutionary process, why should we suppose man's relation to such a being to be more intimate than that of a carnivore or a flea? He has more brain than they; but his brain is adapted to the environment in which he lives and is as far as theirs from forming an idea of the infinite.

Why then does Mr. Macmillan assume that "the normal development of all civilized people" necessarily leads to such questions as "Who made us?" and "What is the purpose of life?" The normal development of *barbaric* peoples leads to such questions, because they do not control or understand the forces of Nature and therefore think anthropomorphically, attributing rainfall and thunderstorms to a Zeus or a Jahveh, and crediting such mythical personages with good or ill will towards man. The normal development of *civilized* peoples leads through such questions to a

criticism of the answers and finally to a perception of the misunderstanding which caused them to be put.

To be unaware of this is to be philosophically illiterate. There was a time when Western philosophers, hampered by the *damnosa hereditas* of the barbaric past and by the pressure of vested interests, set themselves the job of proving the existence of God and the immortality of the soul. As long ago as the eighteenth century it dawned on progressive thinkers in the West that no such proofs were possible. Even those with a deeply rooted will to believe—like Kant—went no further than to say that, while we could not *know* that there was a God and another life, we should *act* as if there were. Others—like Hegel—evaded the issue by using "God" as a synonym for the universe and so depriving the word of any specific meaning.

Today Western philosophers take the view that such questions as the existence of God are meaningless, since no answer admits verification. It is odd that Mr. Macmillan should pin his hopes of peace to the chance that the Russians will begin to ask questions which our professional philosophers have left off asking!

NUCLEAR WARFARE (2)

Originally published in *The Humanist* (October 1958): 28–29

Sir,—In the July *Humanist* I asked for evidence that the USSR sought world domination. In reply, Mr. Streeten cites an extract from Stalin beginning "After the October victory we entered the third state of the revolution."

Since before 1917 the USSR did not exist, and all previous Russian revolutionary movements had failed, it is obvious that Stalin was speaking from the point of view, not of Russia, but of international Communism. That Communists expect to win the world by working-class revolution is no news. It has been public property since Marx and Engels. But it is entirely irrelevant to Mr. Streeten's claim that the USSR *as a State* seeks domination over *other States*.

This is not quibbling, as I can show by concrete illustration. The USSR does not dominate China. On the contrary, the scribblers of the capitalist Press have lately treated us to the theory that China dominates the USSR (you pay your money and take your choice). At the moment of writing we are menaced with war, not because of anything in the USSR, but because the USA insist on protecting Chiang Kai-Shek against the Chinese, who threw him out of China nine years ago.

What on earth has this to do with USSR domination?

Archibald Robertson
Oxford.

SOVIET COMMUNISM

Originally published in *The Humanist* (February 1959): 29

Sir,—I have no intention of using *The Humanist* as a Communist platform—even if you let me, which you wouldn't! But it is important that humanists who attack a thing should know what they are attacking. Mr. Streeten plainly does not.

On the strength of a quotation from Stalin dating from 1924, Mr. Streeten credits the USSR in 1958 with the intention of conquering the world. As I pointed out in my former letter, the quotation does not bear the construction he places on it: in fact, if he had read further, he would have seen that Stalin looked to "the revolutionary movement of the proletariat in all countries" to do the job. But even if Stalin had said in 1924 what Mr. Streeten thinks he said, why should that bind the USSR in 1958? If Mr. Streeten thinks that Marxists learn nothing from history, he little knows Marxism.

I cited the example of China as an obvious refutation of the thesis that the USSR seeks to dominate all other States. Mr. Streeten's reply is that, whatever the appearances are, the USSR *will* try to dominate China. And the evidence? None, except the misunderstood quotation dating from 1924!

There is a German proverb, *Mit der Dummheit kämpfen Götter selbst vergebens*.[78] Being merely human, I give up.

Archibald Robertson
Oxford.

[78] Editors: This literally means: "Against stupidity, the gods themselves battle in vain."

FALSIFICATION?

Originally published in *The Humanist* (December 1959): 29

Sir,—In reviewing John Lewis's *Science, Faith and Scepticism* Professor Flew argues that Marxism is falsified because the only successful Marxist-led revolutions occurred, not in advanced industrial countries, but in Russia, Yugoslavia, and China.

The idea that Marx predicted that the revolution would begin in the most advanced industrial country is a old one, but can be refuted and, as a matter of historical accuracy, ought to be abandoned.

Writing to Engels on October 8, 1858, Marx concedes that the opening up of China, Japan, and other countries to capitalist investment is bound to delay the revolution in "this little corner," Europe. Writing to Sorge on September 1, 1870, at the time of the Franco-German war, he predicts as the inevitable result of German victory "A war between Germany and Russia" which "will act as the midwife to the inevitable social revolution in Russia."

I never thought Marx infallible; but this long shot at 47 years' range is rather remarkable and, amid so much talk of falsified prophecies, deserves recording.

Archibald Robertson
Oxford.

IS IT PEACE?

Originally published in *The Monthly Record* 65, no. 7 (1960): 8–11

[Editors: This was a published abridgement of an address that Robertson gave on 15 May 1960 announcing that he was intending as lecturer for the South Place Ethical Society, a position which he had held for sixteen years. This was one of his final writings as he died a little more than a year later.]

It is sixteen years since I first lectured to this Society, and fifteen since I was appointed a regular lecturer. At that time the war against Fascism was not yet over. Turning up the lectures which I gave at that time, I find that I gave one on *The Grounds of Internationalism*, in which I pointed out that the idea of human society as world-wide (as opposed to the idea of the late Sir Arthur Keith that society was merely the tribe or nation, and that intertribal or international morality did not exist) was a revolutionary idea and involved a radical break with the ideas expressed in the average press article or B.B.C. talk. If we deluded ourselves, I then said, with the idea that World War II was an ordinary war to be ended by an ordinary peace, we were lost. To ensure that that was not so, I pinned my hopes to the then recent re-election of Roosevelt as President of the U.S.A., to the great part certainly (as I then thought) to be played by the U.S.S.R. in-making the peace, and to shoulder-to-shoulder co-operation between this country and these two great al lies.

Well, Roosevelt died and was succeeded by the pigmy Truman. The war ended with the dropping of the first atomic bombs and the inauguration of what has proved a new reign of terror over all mankind. The war-time alliance was succeeded by "cold war" between the former allies. ("Cold war" means perpetually preparing for a "hot war" which we know very well would destroy us all, but which we dare not renounce, because we dare not face problems which renunciation would raise.) And so fifteen years after the end of the shooting war we still do not know whether it is war or peace.

If I feel rather strongly about this, it is because it is the second time in my life that I have been "had." I am old enough to remember World War I. I still remember the shock with which we Freethinkers and Reformists, who had formed our minds on Shelley and Carlyle and Thomas Huxley and Shaw and the Webbs, faced the fact that apparently civilised powers could still of set policy plunge whole peoples into war—and into war, moreover, which no longer meant a gentlemanly game in which Generals out-generalled each other and soldiers killed men who were trying to kill them, but an obscene horror in which submarines sank merchantmen in order to starve civil populations, and airmen rained death from the sky on the men, women and children of enemy cities.

In World War I we blamed it all on Kaiser Wilhelm and the German Junkers. That was what official propaganda told us to do. The press-lords and their hired journalists went further and blamed it all on the whole German people. I never fell for that. T never thought the whole German people responsible for World War I or World War II either, and that for a very simple reason: a whole people can never be responsible for anything. In the words of that old Jewish internationalist tract, the book of Jonah, a whole people includes thousands "that cannot discern between their right hand and their left hand." Or as Shaw put it, "I have no enemies under the age of eight." But while I never fell for the filthy propaganda of the thugs who own, the crooks who edit, and the prostitutes who write the popular press, I accepted the premise of German war-guilt in the sense that the rulers of Germany were criminals against mankind. Accepting this, I held that the victorious allies had the right and the duty after the war to bring those criminals to justice. I thought the demand for hanging the Kaiser justified. I should have been right in thinking so, if there had ever been any serious intention to bring the Kaiser to book. But there was no such intention; it was a dishonest vote-catching cry.

Another bit of propaganda for which I fell was "the war to end war." The war, as it went on, became so filthy and so horrible that only one thing could have justified it. If after the war the victors had built a new world in which war was made for ever impossible, the

horror would have been worthwhile. I think it was Wells who coined the phrase, "a war to end war." I took it from him and used it in argument with friends who took a pacifist line. They were sceptical, indeed indignantly so; and I now know that they were right in their scepticism.

The scales fell from my eyes one day in 1930—twelve years after the end of World War I—when I read in the newspapers that in a German general election five million votes had been cast for Hitler's party of National Socialists. I knew the Nazis by reputation as a party ultra-reactionaries who said that Germany had been stabbed in the back by Jews and Communists, and who called for a war of revenge to recover all she had lost and more than she had lost. And now they were winning elections. So it had not been a war to end war. Wells had been wrong; 1 had been wrong; official propaganda had lied.

There was one set of people in the world who had not only opposed the war, but led a victorious revolution against it. At the time I was bitterly against the Russian Bolsheviks. As Sir Bernard Pares put it, "their revolution happened in the middle of our war." Besides, to imagine that socialism could be built in a backward peasant country was surely absurd. They were bound to fail. So I did not take them seriously. But now, in 1930, with the- Nazis winning in Germany and World War II visibly in the offing, I began to wonder. Was I so sure that the Russians were wrong? If World War II came and Europe became a gas-infested graveyard (in those days we took for granted that gas would be used in any future war) might not Soviet Russia emerge as the sole survivor from the shambles? I knew all the arguments against Bolshevism: I had used them myself. But if the choice lay between war and Bolshevism, I should not choose war. I had been "had" once by war.

In 1933 Hitler came into power in Germany, and the oddest things began to happen. Those press lords, editors and journalists who had bawled their anti-German propaganda in World War I; who had told us there was "no good German but a dead German"; who had coined the slogan, "They will cheat you yet, those Junkers"—those same press lords, editors and journalists showed remarkable goodwill

to Hitler. After all, we read, he had saved Germany from communism. He might yet save Europe from communism. When he in fact intervened in Spain and helped Franco to power, their goodwill increased. Fight Hitler? Never! Let him chew up Czechoslovakia; what were the Czechs to us? Hats off to Neville Chamberlain, who had gone to Munich and brought back peace in our time! "I have here Herr Hitler's written word—" But at that my stomach turned. Next week I joined the Communist Party.

As we know, we had to fight Hitler after all. All that Chamberlain achieved by Munich was to ensure that, when we did fight, we fought without an ally. Poland fell in a fortnight; France fell in a few months. And when we did emerge victorious from World War II, we did so in alliance with the U.S.A. and the U.S.S.R.—that alliance which before the war the whole Tory Party and their press lords, editors and journalists had laughed to scorn and laboured at all costs to avoid.

Fate treated our statesmen better than they deserved: they gained victory and a second chance. As in 1914, so in 1939 the rulers of Germany had wagered for world domination. As in 1918, so in 1945 they had lost. Now was the time, surely, to do what we had failed to do in 1918—to root out that evil ruling class who twice in a lifetime had bathed the world in blood, and to do that in alliance with the only people in Germany who had opposed World War T and World War II—the political heirs of Karl Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg; the party once named Spartacist, later Communist, and now the Socialist Unity Party. With their help Germany might have been cleansed from the black record of her past and turned into a peaceful member of the comity of nations.

But no! West Germany, the Germany of Krupp and the industrialists, of Oberlander and the ex-Nazis, is petted and rearmed. East Germany, where the political heirs of Karl Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg hold power, and such types as Krupp and Oberländer are under proper restraint, is excommunicated and unrecognised. If the Russians propose to terminate the occupation régime by making a

peace treaty with Eastern Germany, that forsooth is an "ultimatum" and a "threat to Berlin."

And if it were, what is Berlin to us? What has Berlin ever done for us? What has Berlin not done against us?

I am an old man. I have been sneered at as "a progressive of fifty years ago." So I am, and proud of it, but I have also learned from two world wars. I doubt whether our statesmen, our press lords, our editors or our journalists ever learn anything. I confess myself tired of them. Let them go to hell their own way; but they shall not drag our children and our grandchildren with them. Everyone who fights *that*—call him Communist, fellow-traveller, starry-eyed idealist, wild-cat striker or what you will—has my support, and shall have it while I have breath in my body.

(Summary of an address delivered May 15)

SOCIALISM AND RELIGION: AN ESSAY

Originally published by *Lawrence & Wishart* (London), 1960.

[Editors: This was among Archibald Robertson's final major projects. After his death there appeared (in English) a reprint of his *The Origins of Christianity*, which itself contained an appended essay on the Dead Sea Scrolls. The editor hopes, soon, to be able to produce a "definitive" edition of *The Origins of Christianity* which contains the various forewords and afterwords by Robertson, Kovalev, and other academics from the various translations. For now, *Socialism and Religion* is reproduced here.]

I INTRODUCTION

Gustave Tridon, the French nineteenth-century Socialist and historian, member of the First International and supporter of the Paris Commune, defined Socialism as in economics Communism, in politics Republicanism and in religion Atheism. This definition is in accord with the Blanquist school of socialism to which Tridon belonged. It also accords with Marx's description of religion as "the opium of the people," "the illusory happiness" made necessary by their unhappy condition.[79] But Marx and Engels expressly repudiated the Blanquist demand that religious organisations should be suppressed. "The only service," wrote Engels, "that can be rendered to God today is to declare atheism a compulsory article of faith."[80] And Marx: "Everyone should be able to attend to his religious as well as his bodily needs without the police sticking their noses in."[81]

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[79] *Marx and Engels on Religion*, p. 42. [Editors: This is originally from the introduction of Marx's *A Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right*.]

[80] Ibid., p. 142. [Editors: This comes from Engels' *Emigrant Literature* II.]

[81] Ibid., p. 143. [Editors: This comes from Marx's *Critique of the Gotha Programme* IV.]

This attitude—a critical detachment from religion, combined with a belief in liberty of conscience—was general among the pioneers of the Second International. Bebel in Germany, Jaurès in France, Morris, Hyndman and Belfort Bax in Britain (however imperfect Marxists some of them were) were personally atheists and expected other Socialists to be atheists, without going so far as to commit the Socialist movement to an atheist crusade. "Religion isa private matter," it was said among the German Social Democrats, "but atheism is a Party matter."

As time went on it became evident that this detachment from religion was not enough. A Socialist Party aims at becoming a mass party, or it may as well shut up shop. Whether we like it or not, the fact remains that many workers are religious. That their religion may be an opium necessitated by their unhappy condition does not alter the fact. The extent to which this is the case naturally varies in different countries. In France, which has a popular anti-clerical tradition dating from the Revolution, the problem is less acute than in English-speaking countries, where popular movements for centuries past have been closely interwoven with religion.

It is not a promising approach to say to such people: "We are not going to interfere with your freedom of conscience; go to church if you must; but our candid opinion is that you are miserable opium-addicts. When you have helped us to build Socialism, you will, we hope, drop the lamentable habit." They want more than mere toleration, they want respect, and if they do not get it from Socialists, they will vote against them.

Faced with this difficulty, Social Democratic politicians dropped the subject of religion altogether, or, worse still, paid religion a degree of lip-service which amounted to a repudiation of Marxism. This unfortunately is only part of that general tendency to compromise with capitalism for petty gains which—initiated by the British Fabians and copied by German and other "revisionists"—rotted away the Second International, led to the betrayal of 1914 and infects today every Social Democratic party of the capitalist West. Communist parties came into existence to remedy that rot and that

betrayal. They have to bring to bear on religion the same scientific methods which they bring to bear on imperialism, war and other manifestations of class society.

But in doing so Communists must avoid a sectarian approach. They must apply Marxism not dogmatically, as if a formula framed for one situation automatically fitted other situations always and everywhere, but dialectically—studying the history of religion and the causes which lead to the prevalence of given religions under given conditions, which under changed conditions lead to the replacement of one religion by another, and which will eventually lead to the replacement of all religions by a scientific and materialist outlook on the world. Such an approach means more than toleration of religious fellow-workers. It means respect for their beliefs as a natural outcome of their past history, and avoidance of such affronts as would needlessly antagonise them in the struggle for Socialism.

II RULING CLASS RELIGION AND MASS RELIGION

1. *Social Origins of Religion*

It is a primary postulate of Marxism that the whole of human life, social, political and intellectual, rests on a material basis. Ever since man was man, he has been a social animal depending for survival on some form of co-operative struggle with the world about him. His ideas reflect that struggle; and the particular form which they take depends on the changing conditions under which he struggles. But his ideas also help to change those conditions. As Marx says, "in practice man must prove the truth, i.e. the reality and power, the 'this sidedness' of his thinking."[82]

In primitive societies man's productive equipment is rudimentary and his thinking equally so. In such societies there is no ruling class, since there is no surplus of food on which a ruling class could live. All are equally engaged in the struggle with nature and equally handicapped by wrong methods and wrong notions. In the

[82] Marx, *Theses on Feuerbach*.

words of Engels, "the low economic development of the prehistoric period is supplemented and also partially conditioned and even caused by the false conceptions of nature"—belief in spirits, magic forces and the like.[83] By rites connected with such beliefs primitive man tries to eke out his very limited control of the environment with which he has to struggle to live.

Recognition of this fact of history is not peculiar to Marxists. Abundant examples of such primitive beliefs and practices may be found in Frazer's *Golden Bough*, Malinowski's *Magic, Science and Religion*, and (mainly in connection with Greek religion) Jane Harrison's Themis. Backward societies use various words to denote a power which they do not understand, but which they try to control by appropriate rites. The Iroquois call such power orenda, and, if a man is thought to have died from witchcraft, say: "An evil orenda has struck him." The Melanesians call it mana. These words are the equivalent in backward societies of what more sophisticated people call "spirit." Like it, they are labels tied to the unknown.

In such primitive societies as those of the Australian aborigines magic is the only religion. Even after the domestication of animals and the cultivation of plants for food "a religious act" and "a means of working magic" are "almost the same thing."[84]

But with the growth of productive equipment from a primitive to a somewhat higher level class society begins. The head of a clan or tribe, credited with more mana than his fellows, becomes a whole-time magician living on surplus food contributed by them. As Frazer puts it, "magicians or medicine-men appear to constitute the oldest artificial or professional class in the evolution of society."[85] Or as Malinowski puts it, "round every big magician there arises a halo made up of stories about his wonderful cures or kills, his catches, his victories, his conquests in love."[86] From the magician wielding his

[83] *Marx-Engels Correspondence*, Engels to Schmidt, 27 October 1890.
[84] Engels, *Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*, I.
[85] Frazer, *Golden Bough*, abridged edition, VII.
[86] Malinowski, *Magic, Science and Religion*, V, 4.

supposed mana for the good of his clan or tribe arise in later society the different conceptions of the priest, the king and the god.

At first the three are not sharply distinguished. But as productive technique becomes more complicated—hunting, for example, giving place to agriculture—and the failures of the magician become more frequent and less easy to explain away, a distinction has to be made between the god, the mighty source of the food supply and continuing life of the community, and his fallible human interpreter. When all goes well, the god is pleased. When all goes ill, the god is angry, and somebody is for it. The unlucky magician is killed—or still better, a magician is killed as soon as he shows any sign of infirmity and without waiting for actual ill-luck, so that his power passes unimpaired into the earth. But a full-blown priest-king is usually rich enough to arrange for a slave or somebody else of no account to be sacrificed instead. Magic has evolved into something recognisable as religion.

Later still a natural division of labour differentiates the priest, the specialist in religious rites and interpreter of the will of the god, from the king, the leader of the community in war. Yet the distinction between priest, king and god masks an underlying identity. As George Thomson says, "the idea of godhead springs from the reality of kingship; but in the human consciousness, split as it now is by the cleavage in society, this relation is inverted. The king's power appears to be derived from God, and his authority is accepted as being the will of God."[87] In the *Iliad* king Sarpedon urges his kinsman Glaucus to the fight, saying: "Why have the people of Lycia conferred on us the highest honours—pride of place and precedence in food and drink? They regard us as gods, and they have bestowed on us an estate of rich ploughland. Therefore we must be foremost in the fray."[88] Even in modern states—though in fewer than formerly—part of the officially prescribed "opium of the people" consists in the elevation of the titular head of the State into a quasi-divinity whose slightest sayings and doings are recorded by press and radio as if they had a

[87] Thomson, *Aeschylus and Athens*, I.
[88] Homer, *Iliad* XII, 310 ff.

supernatural quality. Coronation is a relic of ancient deification—the magic investment of a new ruler with the supernatural powers necessary to assure the continued life of the community. But there is now no corresponding obligation to be "foremost in the fray" or in anything else except, perhaps, the patronage of sport.

2. *Judaism, Christianity and Islam*

As the contradictions in class society widen—as slavery grows; as the gulf grows between rulers, rich in slaves and other wealth, and their subjects; as administrative needs lead to the invention of writing and the rise of a class of scribes separate from the illiterate majority; as cities coalesce into empires and their gods into ordered pantheons; and last but not least, as magical beliefs among the lettered class begin to weaken with the dawn of scientific discovery—the cleavage between rulers and masses is reflected in religion. Official religion, in which the ruling class now only half believes, is kept up as a source of income and an instrument of government. Popular religion, centring as it always did round the preservation and renewal of life, tends—as actual life becomes less and less pleasant—to become associated with hopes of future deliverance, and as deliverance in this life becomes less and less likely, with dreams of another life which wishful thinking locates beyond the grave. The annual resurrection of the corn-god (Osiris in Egypt, Attis in Asia Minor, or whoever he may be) is felt to be a sort of pledge that men too may by appropriate ritual be redeemed from death and "reborn to eternal life." So in Egypt, in Persia, in Greece, in one ancient civilisation after another, arose the various "mystery religions," all holding out to their initiates the hope of a happy immortality in compensation for present misery.

The same cleavage between official and popular religion helps to explain a phenomenon which pre-Marxist historians can only record as an inexplicable fact—the appearance in the ancient Mediterranean world of the Jewish people, who (to quote Gibbon) "excited the curiosity and wonder of other nations" by "the sullen obstinacy with which they maintained their peculiar rites and unsocial

manners": and the later transmission of their "exclusive zeal" to the early Christians.[89]

Palestine, the country of origin of Judaism and Christianity, was a meeting-place between the tribal society of the desert and the civilisations of Egypt and Babylonia, and the scene of constant clashes between the rival empires seated in those two countries. The people of Palestine thus had long first-hand experience of the contrast between tribal society and class society.

Israel was originally a collection of desert tribes who in the fourteenth century 8.c., during the decline of Egyptian power, invaded and settled in Palestine, as other desert tribes had done before, and as others did later. The story of their migrations in the early books of the Old Testament was compiled many hundreds of years after the settlement and is no more historical than the Homeric story of the Trojan War. Archaeology has confirmed the fact of the destruction of Jericho, as it has confirmed the fact of the destruction of Troy; but Joshua and the trumpets are as mythical as Agamemnon and the wooden horse.

Once settled in Palestine, Israel passed through the usual evolution from tribal society to class society, but with important differences. First, the tribal society of the desert was near at hand to remind the exploited people of the freedom they had lost. Secondly, there was no state in Palestine strong enough to repress such mass movements as occurred, until the conquest by Assyria in the eighth century B.C. Thirdly, even after that the rivalry of the great empires—Assyria, Egypt, Babylon, Persia, and the successors of Alexander the Great—meant that none held Palestine securely and few held it long, until in the last century B.C. Rome conquered the East. Hence the disinherited classes hoped longer than elsewhere for earthly deliverance. Their hopes were voiced by the prophets, whose writings are the oldest revolutionary literature we possess. This literature—written in rhythmical verse so as to be readily memorised, passed from hand to hand, interpolated as occasion arose, and ranging in date from the eighth to the second century B.C.—inveighs against kings,

[89] Gibbon, *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, XV.

priests, usurers and other enemies of the people, and looks back to the legendary days "in the wilderness" as an age when such oppressors were unknown. In the eighth century the peasant-poet Amos thus attacks the priesthood:

> I hate, I despise your feasts,
> And I will take no delight in your solemn assemblies.
> Yea, though ye offer me your burnt offerings and meal offerings,
> I will not accept them:
> Neither will I regard the same peace offerings of your fat beasts.
> Take thou away from me the noise of thy songs;
> For I will not hear the melody of thy viols.
> But let judgment roll down as waters,
> And righteousness as a mighty stream.[90]

The class struggle resulted in a compromise between the priests and the prophets, embodied in a law-book compiled about 400 B.C. and fictitiously attributed to Moses—the Pentateuch or first five books of the Bible. No gods are to be worshipped but one—Jahveh, the god of the nomad ancestors of Israel. There is to be only one temple—that at Jerusalem. All are to have a weekly day of rest—even slaves. Human sacrifice and other barbaric rites are forbidden. Slavery is allowed; but runaway slaves are to be freed, and every seven years all debts between Jews are to be cancelled and all Jewish slaves offered their freedom and a chance to start as independent producers. No such radical programme had ever been enacted before. How much of it was ever executed is an interesting question.

Monotheism is not a mere matter of metaphysics. A god is not merely a hypothetical being who rains and thunders and gives or withholds your food supply, but the centre of an organised cult with a priesthood who live on offerings. When people get to the point of resenting priestly extortions and seeing through obvious priestly impostures, but have not yet got to the point of denying gods

[90] Amos v, 21–4.

altogether, the question whether they shall support many priesthoods or only one becomes of practical importance. When we read the invectives of the prophets against idolatry, we find it closely bound up not with the abstract question whether the principle of the universe is many or one, but with concrete issues between the "haves" and "have-nots." Gods are costly beings; their reduction to one was an economy in temples and priests, and progressive for that time.

In the struggle between empires Palestine fell successively to Assyria, Babylon, Persia, Greece and finally Rome. To the Greek and Roman conquerors the Jews seemed an odd brand of fanatics with their insistence on one God only and their peculiar code of law. To the Jewish people the conquerors seemed devouring beasts, each worse than the last. And they did not keep their opinion to themselves. During the last three centuries B.C. colonies of Jews, scattered in the cities of the Mediterranean and speaking Greek as their adopted tongue, propagated their ideas and made thousands of proselytes. There were repeated attempts to repress Jewish propaganda—the attempt of Antiochus IV in the second century B.C. to suppress Judaism altogether; the expulsion of the Jews from Rome by the emperors Tiberius and Claudius; the crushing of the Jewish revolt by Titus and the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70; finally, the crushing of the last Jewish revolt by Hadrian and the expulsion of the Jews from Judaea in A.D. 135.

In the literature of the Jewish revolutionary struggle which has come down to us a prominent feature is the idea of a Messiah—an "anointed king" and heaven-sent leader who will break the yoke of the oppressor and usher in a golden age of peace and justice. The idea of the Messiah varies very much: sometimes he is a "son of David," a prince of the old royal line of Judah; sometimes he is a living leader; sometimes he is a supernatural being chosen by God before the beginning of days. As time goes on and the struggle of the Jewish people becomes more desperate, the character of the Messiah and the circumstances in which he is to appear become more visionary and supernatural. But any Jewish revolutionary leader

might aspire to the rôle, and we know that many did. Among Greek-speaking Jews the word for the Messiah was *Christos*= Christ.

The name "Christian," therefore, to inhabitants of the Roman Empire originally meant the follower of a Christ or Messiah. As such it had a revolutionary significance. That is what we are to understand when we read in Suetonius that Claudius expelled the Jews from Rome because they "constantly made disturbances at the instigation of Chrestus," and that Nero inflicted punishment on "the Christians, a class of men given to a new and mischievous superstition."[91] When we read in Tacitus that these Christians derived their name from a Christ who was executed by the procurator of Judaea, Pontius Pilate, there is nothing incredible about it. That sort of thing would happen.

But in travelling through the Mediterranean cities Jewish ideas suffered a good deal of modification. Not all Jews were hostile to the Roman Empire. Some were doing well in business and had no interest in revolutionary movements. They might dislike much of what they saw in the Empire—its primitive religious rites, its gladiatorial shows and so on. But a head-on clash with the Empire was the last thing they wanted, and a Messianic propaganda leading to such a clash filled them with alarm.

Consequently we find from the first century of our era onward an organised attempt to give the Messianic idea an other-worldly interpretation on the analogy of the mystery religions already widespread in the Mediterranean. In the books of the New Testament, as we have them, we see an originally revolutionary propaganda deliberately countered—not to say smothered—by another which contradicts it. On the one hand we have slogans like, ""The kingdom of God is at hand"—that kingdom which, Jewish patriots hoped, would "break in pieces and consume" all the beast-empires of the earth and stand for ever:[92]

He has put down princes from thrones,
And has exalted them of low degree.

[91] Suetonius, *Claudius*, XXV, 4; *Nero*, XVI, 2.
[92] Daniel ii, 44. Cf. Mark i, 15.

The hungry he has filled with good things;
And the rich he has sent empty away.[93]

On the other hand we have "my kingdom is not of this world,"[94] "our wrestling is not against flesh and blood,"[95] and—in the direct tradition of the mystery religions—

That which you yourself sow is not quickened,
Except it die…
So also the resurrection of the dead…
Now this I say, brothers,
That flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God.[96]

It is significant that the chief apostle of this spiritual gospel is said to have been a prosperous master-craftsman, a tentmaker, perhaps doing jobs for the Roman army—Paul of Tarsus.[97]

Early Christianity owed what mass appeal it had to its promise of a speedy overthrow of the Roman Empire (the "beast" with "seven heads," the "great harlot arrayed in purple and scarlet"[98]) and of "a new heaven and a new earth" in which the redeemed would "reign for ever and ever."[99] But it owed its funds and its organisation to men who sought not the overthrow of the Empire, but an alliance with it, and who either rejected these revolutionary prophecies or interpreted them in a strictly spiritual sense. By the Church leaders, in Gibbon's words, "the doctrine of Christ's reign upon earth was at first treated as a profound allegory, was considered by degrees as a doubtful and useless opinion, and was at length rejected as the absurd invention of

[93] Luke i, 52–3.
[94] John xviii, 36.
[95] Ephesians vi, 12.
[96] 1 Corinthians xv, 36 ff.
[97] Prosperous—since he could travel about the Mediterranean at his own cost. Roman citizenship suggests a man of substance.
[98] Revelation xvii, 1 ff.
[99] Ibid., xxi–xxii.

heresy and fanaticism."[100] The Apocalypse scraped into the canon only by the skin of its teeth.

The rulers of the Empire hesitated how to treat such a movement. If it was revolutionary, to the lions with it! If not, a deal might be possible. Finally in the fourth century Constantine did a deal, and the Church became an instrument of government and a partner in the new feudalism that was arising on the ruins of ancient slave civilisation. The Donatists in North Africa, who repudiated the compromise between Church and Empire, who rallied peasants, runaway slaves and insolvent debtors to their standard, and who "pretended to restore the primitive equality of mankind," were hunted down like "the wild beasts of the desert," and dying "by the sword, the axe or the fire," were the first Christians to be martyred by their fellow-Christians.[101]

The Church never won the unanimous allegiance of the Mediterranean peoples. The Creed adopted in 325 at the Council of Nicaea, with its contradictory dogmas about "Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God, begotten of his Father before all worlds . . . being of one substance with the Father, by whom all things were made: who for us men, and for our salvation came down from heaven . . . and was made
man, and was crucified also for us under Pontius Pilate," was a politically dictated attempt to reconcile irreconcilable elements in Christianity—the mystery-god dying and rising that his people might have eternal life, and the tradition of a Jewish Messiah crucified by a Roman procurator. Large masses of the population—significantly enough, mainly in those Middle Eastern countries where Christianity had first arisen and where its original Jewish form was most likely to be remembered—refused to swallow this bundle of contradictions by imperial order.

And in the seventh century, when a new Arab invasion burst on the enfeebled Empire proclaiming the old Judaeo-Christian doctrine of the unity of God and the equality of all believers, the

[100] Gibbon, *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, XV.
[101] Ibid., XXI.

peoples of the Middle East welcomed the invaders as deliverers and went over *en masse* to Islam. In North Africa, the home of the Donatists, imperial and ecclesiastical extortions "provoked the sectaries, and even the Catholics, of the Roman province to abjure the religion as well as the authority of their tyrants."[102] Just as Judaism had arisen as a mass movement against priestly exploiters, just as Christianity had arisen as a mass movement against imperial Rome, so Islam spread as a mass movement against a Church which had betrayed the masses, and whose Mariolatry and saint-worship were thin disguises for the paganism it pretended to supersede.

Needless to say, after Islam had conquered an empire, it became in its turn a ruling class religion—the instrument of domination of caliphs, sultans, shahs, emirs, pashas, beys and effendis, and of the feudal rulers of the Middle East today.

3. *The Middle Ages*

During the Middle Ages the established social order in western Europe was feudalism based on serfdom, and the greatest feudal landowner was the Catholic Church. The Church justified its privileges by a theology according to which Christ had given to the Pope (assumed on flimsy evidence to be the successor of Peter) the keys of the kingdom of heaven and the power to remit sins. This power is delegated by the Pope to all Catholic bishops, and by the bishops to the humblest priest ordained by the laying on of their hands. Further, according to Catholic dogma, every ordained priest has the miraculous power of changing bread and wine into the actual body and blood of Christ, which in the mass he offers as a sacrifice for the sins of the living and the dead.

This dogma of transubstantiation—the magic power of the priest in the mass to "make his Maker"—is of more than theological importance. On such magic powers hangs the whole prestige of the priestly office. Much of the vast wealth of the Catholic Church is derived from the donations and bequests of generations of the faithful

[102] Ibid., LI.

who believed that masses would be effective in ameliorating their lot after death. According to a famous twelfth-century theologian, Peter Lombard, "if two men, one poor and the other rich, die the same day, the one having no other succour than the ordinary prayers of the Church, while for the other many masses can be said and many works of charity can be done, the rich man's deliverance from purgatory will not be more perfect, but it will be earlier."[103] If there is nothing miraculous about the mass, the Church's wealth has been obtained on false pretences. In fighting for transubstantiation the Church fights for no mere metaphysical definition, but for the income and social status of her hierarchy.

Throughout the Middle Ages there were opposition movements of one kind or another to these pretensions of the Church. We have seen how the attempt to enforce a uniform creed led to the loss of the whole Middle East to Islam. In the West the peasantry, whose conversion to Christianity was often forced and far from thorough, kept up old pagan rites in the form of the witch-cult. But this was a hole-and-corner business and a reactionary, not a progressive, movement. There was no dangerous opposition to the Western Church until the revival of trade led to the rise of the bourgeoisie (burghers—people of the burghs or towns).

From the thirteenth century, when heretical movements in the towns began to be dangerous, the Church met them by savage repression. That century saw the crusade against the Cathari or Albigenses in southern France and the foundation of the Inquisition. The fourteenth century saw the rise of the Lollards in England, the Peasant Revolt of 1381 (when the Archbishop of Canterbury was beheaded by rebels who told him they cared nothing for the Pope or his interdicts) and a spread of disbelief in priestly and monkish impostures which finds vent even in the courtly Chaucer's Canterbury Tales. The fifteenth century saw the repression of the Lollards by stake and faggot in England and Scotland, and the more successful Hussite rising in Bohemia—a patriotic war against papal

[103] D'Aubigné, *History of the Great Reformation*.

and German domination which the Czech people remember to this day with pride.

By now the bourgeoisie were becoming richer through the expansion of production and the use of new inventions. They were also becoming better educated through the multiplication of schools and universities, the revival of the classics and the invention of the printing press. At the end of the fifteenth century the discovery of America and of the Cape route to India and the Far East opened up new sources of wealth. At the same time feudal power in England, France and Spain became concentrated in the hands of national monarchs who, while they used the Church as an instrument of government, were determined to control it and not to be controlled by it. These contradictions in feudalism cleared the way for the bourgeoisie and heralded the birth of the modern world.

4. *The Reformation*

The Reformation of the sixteenth century was precipitated by the attempt of the Pope to raise money by the sale of indulgences (documents purporting to remit sin) in Germany; but the effect was to fire a train already laid in most countries of western Europe. The outcome in different countries depended on differences in their economic and political development. Generally speaking, in countries poor in natural resources, such as north Germany, Scandinavia and Scotland, the whole laity—feudal lords, bourgeoisie and peasants—resented the exactions of the Church and saw a chance to get their own back. These countries went solidly Protestant. In countries rich in natural resources, such as Italy and Spain with her new oversea empire, the feudal lords and upper bourgeoisie had little or no reason to quarrel with the Church, and the Inquisition soon burnt out any heresy there was. The countries in between—south Germany, France, England and the Netherlands—saw the longest and fiercest struggles. In south Germany the violent repression that followed the Peasants' War practically finished the cause of the Reformation. The burghers, who had begun as enthusiastic

Lutherans, became half-hearted; the peasants had nothing left to fight for; and in the second half of the sixteenth century Catholic reaction, directed by the Jesuits, had a walk-over. In England London and the south-east, where capitalism was rapidly developing, were Protestant, while the feudal north and west were Catholic. The result was a seesaw during the reigns of Henry VIII, Edward VI, Mary and Elizabeth I, ending in the establishment of a Church which ever since has tried to reconcile incompatibles. In France the Protestants were strong among the lesser feudal lords and the bourgeoisie; but the monarchy and the greater lords had no wish to quarrel with the Pope and drive him into the arms of Spain. Thirty years of exhausting civil war ended in the Edict of Nantes and temporary toleration. In the Netherlands the Reformation was identified with the national revolt against Spain. In the end the feudal lords and rich bourgeois of the southern Netherlands sold out to Spain and remained Catholic, while the less rich burghers of the north founded the Protestant Dutch Republic.

The nature of Protestant theology varied correspondingly. To feudal monarchs the important thing was to control the Church in their own countries. If they could do this by arrangement with the Pope, as in France and Spain, all the better for them. If it meant getting rid of papal authority, as in England, they did so, but went no further with the Reformers than suited them. The bourgeoisie preferred, if possible, to control the Churches in their own interest. This by no means suited the monarchs, and in the seventeenth century helped to produce a revolutionary situation in England and Scotland. The peasants wanted to be free from exploitation whether by feudal lords or by rich bourgeois. Failing that, it mattered little to them which religion won. The different balance of forces in different countries accounts for the varieties of Protestant belief.

To Luther, a Reformer of petty bourgeois origin, but dependent on the good will of German princes, the essential thing was to stop the Pope from picking German pockets by such devices as the indulgence traffic. His central dogma, therefore, was “justification by

faith"—meaning that you were saved by your state of mind, not by forking out to the priest.

This stand made him a German national hero. In his early utterances he goes further and says that peasants and children "understand more of Jesus Christ than the Pope, the bishops or the doctors."[104] But after the Peasants' War he asks himself "whether it might not have been better to have allowed the Papacy to pursue its course unmolested than to be a witness to the breaking out of such commotions."[105] Thenceforth he is merely the kept theologian of the north German princes. In his last sermon in 1546 he calls reason "the devil's bride" and "an accursed whore."[106]

Similarly to the English Reformers, Cranmer, Ridley and Latimer, the main thing was to end the jurisdiction of the Pope "in this realm of England."[107] Latimer went further and denounced the social injustices of his day, such as the expropriation of the peasantry, but in so doing was almost alone among ecclesiastics.

All these men had to back their onslaught on the Pope by an authority higher than his. They found this in the Bible, from which they showed that papal claims had no basis in the doctrine or practice of the early Church. The translation of the Bible into the vernacular tongues of modern Europe was the great gift of the Reformation to the world.

The chief attempt to reduce Protestantism to a coherent system was Calvin's. A French bourgeois and a fine scholar, he had to fly from France and settled at Geneva, where he became the paid preacher and confidential adviser of the rich citizens who had just kicked out their bishop and set up a self-governing republic. Calvin stretched theology to the utmost limit to which it can be stretched without breaking. God is all-knowing: therefore he knows and has determined in advance who will be saved and who damned. There is therefore no place in the scheme of things for popes, bishops or

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[104] D'Aubigné, op. cit.
[105] Ibid.
[106] Beard, *Lectures on the Reformation*, V.
[107] *Articles of Religion*, XXXVII.

priests. Some irreverent person may interject that if everything is predestined, there is no use in having a Church at all. But he will be wrong. The true Church, for Calvin, is the congregation of the elect, governing themselves through ministers of their own choice. As Engels put it, "the kingdom of God was republicanized"[108]—like the city of Geneva. But "republicanised" did not mean "democratized." The ministers elected under Calvin's system were to supervise new elections, exclude objectionable candidates, and expel from the Church all who by evil life or heretical opinions showed that they were not among the saved, but among the damned.

Calvinism was a very comforting doctrine to the rich citizens of Geneva, whom it enabled to run their own Church without the interference of prince or prelate and to discipline any trouble-maker who questioned their right to do so. And it was to be a very comforting doctrine to the seventeenth-century bourgeoisie in England and Scotland, who used it to prove that the industrious middle classes were the elect of God and to justify their struggle for power against the Stuart monarchs and the relics of the feudal system. But there were Reformers who were not content with State Churches established and endowed by kings, princes or rich citizens to serve their convenience. The vernacular Bible became a weapon not only of the laity against priestcraft and of the bourgeoisie against kingcraft, but of petty bourgeois and artisans against the imposition of any doctrine or ritual rejected by their "inner light'. Already in the early days of the Reformation simple artisans who read Luther's New Testament found that there was no more warrant in it for infant baptism than for the mass, and no more warrant for the Trinity than for saint-worship; that according to the Gospels Jesus had forbidden his followers to take oaths or to bear arms; that according to the Acts the primitive Church had had all things common and distributed to each according to his need. They concluded that riches were unchristian, and that rulers who imposed unscriptural rites and doctrines should be resisted to the death by Christian men and women. These Anabaptists or "rebaptisers" (so-called from their

[108] Engels, *Socialism: Utopian and Scientific*, introduction.

practice of rebaptising those who joined them) were persecuted by Catholics and Protestants alike, hunted out of Germany and Switzerland into the Netherlands, and out of the Netherlands into England. Their one departure from strict pacifism, provoked by years of savage repression, was the seizure of power in 1534 in the German city of Münster. The orgy of vengeance that followed its recapture in 1535 ended them as a political force on the Continent. Finding that there was nothing to choose between Catholic, Lutheran and Calvinist persecutors, they abandoned the struggle and lost their importance as a sect. But in England, then in the van of economic and political development, they had a future.

By 1575 we find in East Anglia an artisan sect of Anabaptist origin called the Family of Love, who "attenuated all Scriptures into Allegories, and made them airy, empty nothing";[109] and another called the Family of the Mount, who "questioned whether there were an heaven or an hell, but what is in this life," and "believed that all things come by nature."[110] Anabaptism in fact sowed the seeds of popular freethought. But the menace of the stake still deterred all but the boldest from such speculations. Most left-wing sectaries were content to insist on the right of each congregation to elect its own officers and manage its own affairs without the intervention of the State or its nominees, the bishops. By 1593 these Brownists (as they were called from their founder, Robert Browne) were estimated to number nearly twenty thousand. They were to win revolutionary fame in the next century under the name of Independents.

5. *The English Reformation*

The growing revolutionary situation in seventeenth-century England won for the left-wing sects a relaxation of persecution and finally full toleration. After 1612 no more heretics were burnt: the temper of the

[109] Fuller, *Church History of Britain*.
[110] Strype, *Annals of the Reformation*.

people was too dangerous.[111] They were still liable to imprisonment, pillorying, whipping, branding and other forms of annoyance. In 1640 the Long Parliament met; and in 1642 the Civil War began.

Neither side had at first any idea of allowing dissent in religion. Doctrinal uniformity seemed as necessary to Parliament as to Charles I and Laud, though they differed as to the kind of religion to be imposed. The Cavaliers objected to the Calvinist republicanisation of the kingdom of God. "We who are now governed by the canon and civil law dispensed by twenty-six ordinaries"[112]—said the gentlemen of Cheshire to the Long Parliament—"should become exposed to the mere arbitrary government of a numerous Presbytery, who, together with their ruling elders, will arise to near forty thousand Church governors…The consequences would prove the utter loss of learning and laws, which must necessarily produce an extermination of nobility, gentry and order, if not of religion."[113] The city of London on the other hand was Presbyterian, because "by filling the elderships those very merchants and tradesmen constituted the Church for purposes of jurisdiction. Whatever ecclesiastical tyranny there was would be exercised by themselves."[114]

But Parliament had to enlist to fight for it those yeomen and tradesmen of East Anglia whose fathers had been in the van of the Reformation, and who ever since then had been learning to think for themselves on the data at their disposal. High among those data ranked the English Bible; and they read it against a background of hard work to which the courtiers of Whitehall and the gentry at Westminster were alike strangers. Some were Independents; some were Anabaptists who felt that at last they had a cause to fight for; a few—but as yet only a few—were indifferent to all Churches. All were agreed in denying the right of any earthly authority to prescribe

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[111] The last victim, the Anabaptist Edward Wightman at Lichfield, was nearly rescued by the crowd. Laud, as chaplain to the bishop of Lichfield, was active in the proceedings against Wightman.

[112] Bishops.

[113] Cheshire Petition to the House of Lords, cited by Gardiner, *History of England*, XCVI.

[114] Gardiner, *History of England*, XL.

their opinions, or of any established Church to tithe them for its support. With John Milton they held that "New Presbyter is but Old Priest writ large."

The quarrel came to a head after victory in the Civil War. The chief Parliamentary leaders, backed by the London merchants and their Scottish allies, demanded the establishment and enforcement of Presbyterianism. The New Model army (and thousands not in the army) demanded freedom of conscience, abolition of tithes and payment of ministers of religion by voluntary contributions. These demands developed into the Leveller movement—the first democratic movement in modern history—which in 1647 frightened Parliament out of its wits and shook the authority of Cromwell himself. The rejection of the Leveller programme by Cromwell (who had tried to mediate between Parliament and the army) and his subsequent forcible suppression of the Levellers ended the only democratic phase of the English Revolution. The yeomen and tradesmen who had followed Cromwell to victory at Marston Moor and Naseby had nothing left to fight for, and after his death allowed Charles II to be restored without a struggle. But the New Model could boast that it had saved England not only from Laudian, but from Calvinist oppression. A by-product of the defeat of the Levellers and consequent disillusionment with the Revolution was the foundation of George Fox's Society of Friends, who in reliance on their "inner light" rejected with equal emphasis both tyranny and the waging of war against it. Both John Lilburne, the Leveller, and Gerrard Winstanley, the Digger, ended their days in the Society of Friends.[115]

The Restoration, though formally it re-established the monarchy and the Anglican Church, and for a time imposed penalties on dissent, proved in practice the inability of king or Church to stand up to the capitalists who now held effective power. The attempts of Charles II and James II to restore absolute monarchy by openly

[115] The affiliation of the Society of Friends to the Anabaptists is shown among other things by Fox's famous cry, "Woe to the bloody city of Lichfield," as he walked through the streets early in his mission. He must have known of the burning of Wightman a generation before.

promoting Catholics and secretly collaborating with Louis XIV alienated the bourgeoisie who had brought them back, and involved their dynasty in final shipwreck. The "glorious Revolution" of 1688 ended at one blow autocracy in the State and the Anglican monopoly in religion.

By the Toleration Act of 1689 all Protestant Nonconformists—Presbyterians, Baptists,[116] Independents, Friends—became free-to worship as they liked, though down to 1828 they were excluded from Parliament and from public office. Penalties were still imposed—and theoretically may be imposed to this day—for denying the truth of Christianity or the divine authority of the Bible. But in practice the bourgeoisie could be deists or even atheists, provided they kept their deism or their atheism a class secret. The Blasphemy Acts were used only against writers or speakers who threatened to unsettle the masses, and in our generation have ceased to be used at all. Their maintenance on the statute book as a weapon in reserve to protect dogmas in which the ruling class themselves have very largely ceased to believe is one of the many contradictions of capitalism.

III HUMANISM INTO MARXISM

1. *The Rise of Modern Humanism*

It is evident from the last chapter that the bourgeoisie have a two-faced attitude to religion. On the one hand their rise as a class necessitated the overthrow and expropriation of the largest feudal landowner, the Catholic Church, in the countries where they first won

[116] "Baptist" is only a shorter form of "Anabaptist." To assist in winning toleration and bourgeois respectability the sect seem to have shed the prefix as an undesirable link with their revolutionary past. Doubtless for much the same reason modern Independents prefer to be known as Congregationalists. [Editors: the Baptists are probably not related to the Anabaptists, at least not in any closeness. Their theologies greatly differ and it appears that by the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries they already had a majorly strained relationship, and so we cannot really say that "Baptist" is a shortening of "Anabaptist."]

power. On the other hand, since the bourgeoisie is itself an exploiting class, it has an interest in establishing and endowing some form of religion. The particular brand varies with circumstances. It may be Lutheran, Anglican or Calvinist; and the history of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries shows that to procure a united front against Socialism the bourgeoisie are not above a deal with their old enemy, the Catholic Church. But whatever the brand and whatever their private beliefs, they publicly support Christianity and identify capitalism with "Christian civilisation."

But it is beyond the power of the bourgeoisie to confine the battle of ideas within arbitrary limits. Once the power of the Catholic Church was broken, there was no logical halting-place short of atheistic humanism—the assertion of human interests (to the exclusion of hypothetical divine interests) as the final criterion of theory and practice.

Side by side with the development of class society, culminating in the rise of modern capitalism, has gone the development of science. Both have their roots in the improvement of productive equipment. Scientific discovery had already gone some way in antiquity, but was hampered by the slave basis of ancient society, which discouraged practical experiment and exalted arm-chair philosophies such as those of Plato and Aristotle. But the emergence of a capitalist economy at the end of the Middle Ages led to the rapid development of science. With the need to open up new trade routes, and the consequent discovery of America and the sea route to India, came the need of accurate and easily manageable astronomical tables for use in ocean navigation. The Ptolemaic astronomy based on the motion of the heavenly bodies round the earth, and supported by Aristotle and the Bible, had held the field through the Middle Ages, since medieval navigators were seldom or never out of sight of land, and rough and ready reckonings sufficed. Ocean voyages altered all that. The inadequacy of the Ptolemaic system was already apparent when Copernicus, a Polish priest who had studied astronomy in Italy, set himself to work out a simpler system based on the motion of the earth on its axis, and of the earth

and the other planets round the sun. He never thought of attacking the Church: he dedicated his book to the Pope. But once it was admitted that the Bible was wrong on one point—the stationary position of the earth in the universe—who could tell where that would end? So, although tables based on the system of Copernicus were in use soon after his death, the Church would not allow that system to be taught as true.

Again, the use of fire-arms in war, among other factors, made necessary a more accurate knowledge of the human body for the purposes of surgery and medicine. This greatly stimulated the growth of a scientific attitude to the world. Medicine differs from other learned professions in being also a handicraft. The Church and the law can indulge in fiction with impunity; but a doctor who bases his practice on fiction kills his patients. Hence doctors led the way in undermining superstition. Even in the Middle Ages there was a proverb: "Where there are three doctors, there are two atheists." We all remember Chaucer's "doctor of physic" whose "studie was but litel on the Bible." When a doctor *did* study the Bible, the results were likely to be awkward for the Bible or for the doctor. A doctor, Servetus, who anticipated Harvey's discovery of the circulation of the blood, also exploded the dogma of the Trinity and was burnt in Calvin's Geneva. Another doctor, Johann Weier, was the first modern critic of the superstition of witchcraft.

Since the rising bourgeoisie and their governments needed science for navigation, for war and, as time went on, for industry generally, science went ahead and with it the habit of relying on observation and experiment rather than on the Bible or any other ancient authority. Not that the pioneers of science usually rejected the established religion. They usually conformed to it. Galileo did not want to attack the Catholic Church; but the Church, terrified of the consequences of admitting that the Bible could err, would not let him alone. Newton, who completed the work of Galileo by formulating the laws of motion, was a devout Protestant, though doubts about the Trinity prevented him from taking orders. But whatever homage scientists might pay to the religion in which they had been brought

up, a picture of the world in which the reign of law was universal, and the earth only one planet of one sun among millions of suns, made it increasingly difficult to believe in a God who took any special interest in the doings of men and women. Spinoza, the greatest philosopher of the seventeenth century, saw the impossibility, and though he continued to use the word "God," in fact identified God with nature. Even to assume God as the First Cause who set the world-machine in motion (a last ditch occupied by some theists to this day) was to make him in effect a constitutional monarch who reigned, but did not govern—a God who had doubtless originated the laws of nature, but did not dispense with them daily as traditional religion pictured him doing. This desiccated theology —deism—was very fashionable among the British bourgeoisie of the early eighteenth century, who had just reduced their earthly monarch to an equally innocuous status. The fundamentalist gospel of Wesley and Whitefield, with its crude appeal to the hope of heaven and the fear of hell, was repulsive to the Established Church. Its preachers were barred from the pulpits and slowly forced into secession.

If deism—from which it was only a step to materialism—was popular with the British bourgeoisie, still more was it popular in continental countries where the battle against feudalism had yet to be won. Feudal privileges were interlocked with the dogma of a God who had ordained princes to bear the sword and priests to remit sin. Naturally the spokesmen of the French bourgeoisie in the eighteenth century, Voltaire, Rousseau and the Encyclopaedists, went for that theology hammer and tongs. But the position of the bourgeoisie on the Continent, as in England, was contradictory. They wanted to abolish feudalism, but to safeguard bourgeois property. Hence most of them stopped short of a total rejection of religion. Rarely did a radical thinker like Diderot or Holbach declare God an unnecessary hypothesis and mutual aid a sufficient social sanction. The position of most of the bourgeoisie was expressed in the frank epigram of

Voltaire: "If God did not exist, it would be necessary to invent him."[117]

The idea of a minimum religion essential to social order was further developed in the writings of Rousseau, and found ingenious expression in the philosophy of Kant. Kant knew well that theology could not stand up to "theoretical reason." He therefore proved by idealist arguments—already used for apologetic purposes by Berkeley, but reduced by Kant to a formal precision of which the Irish bishop was incapable—that the whole world of common sense and of science existed only in the mind. Such arguments are unconvincing to those who live by handling the material world and shaping it to human purposes. No farmer sowing seed, no sailor navigating by the stars believes that "the whole choir of heaven and furniture of the earth"[118] exist only in his mind. But idealism is a fascinating tour de force for arm-chair philosophers who divorce theory from practice. Kant, in his own words, "abolished knowledge to make room for belief."[119] He made room, not by "theoretical," but by "practical reason" for just those beliefs which the bourgeoisie found necessary to their security and comfort—an absolute moral law, a God who was the source of that law, and a future life in which the wrongs of this world would be righted. That most people are forced by equally "practical reason" to make room for the land on which they labour, the food and drink which they consume, and the means of production which they use, did not occur to the Königsberg professor.

2. *The French Revolution and After*

This two-faced attitude to religion found practical expression in the French Revolution of 1789. The bourgeoisie, represented by the National Assembly and later by the National Convention, unceremoniously expropriated the feudal lords and the Catholic

[117] Editors: This is from Voltaire's, "Epistle to the Author of The Three Impostors" (1770).
[118] Berkeley, *Principles of Human Knowledge*.
[119] Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, preface to second edition.

Church, sold their property to enrich themselves, and from 1792 on successfully fought half Europe to defend their gains. But to do so they had—like the English Long Parliament in its day—to arm and drill peasants and artisans who would have seen no point in a Revolution that did everything for the bourgeoisie and nothing for them. To fight foreign invaders the Revolutionary leaders had to make concessions to the masses. The Girondins, who would not make concessions, had to make way for the Jacobins, who did. But concessions stopped short of tolerating attacks on bourgeois property or the open propagation of atheism. Leftwing revolutionaries—Cloots, Chaumette and so on—who transgressed these limits went in 1794 to the guillotine as unpitied as any king, noble, priest or other enemy of the nation.

Finally, once the gains of the Revolution were safe, Robespierre, the devout deist, was guillotined in his turn and the Jacobins suppressed. Napoleon Bonaparte was called in to protect the bourgeoisie from enemies of the right or left, and the Catholic Church was eventually re-established under State control as a licensed retailer of opium to the people.[120]

The supreme theoretical expression of this attitude to religion is the philosophy of Hegel. Anyone who picks up a work of Hegel will find it peppered with words like "God," "spirit" and so on. He may conclude that Hegel is a pious Christian. He will be wrong. Hegel is no Christian. He takes over the idealist philosophy of Kant, according to which the world exists only in and for mind, but instead of (like Kant) giving the name "God" to an unknowable being behind phenomena, he gives that name (as Spinoza had done) to the world-process itself. Thus history to Hegel is nothing but the unfolding of the divine ideas. They unfold by a process called "dialectic"—a word which sounds formidable to the uninitiated, but is only a new label for the old fact that nothing stays put. "The old order changeth, yielding place to new"—its antithesis or negation. The new in its turn grows old and yields place to a yet newer—which, as it is the result

[120] Napoleon's view appears in his remark: "Don't talk to me of men without God. I knew men without God in 1793. You don't govern men like that; you shoot them."

of its two predecessors, may be called their synthesis or "the negation of negation." The beauty of Hegelian philosophy is that it can mean quite different things to different people. A Hegelian can publicly profess Christianity and even Trinitarian Christianity (thesis, antithesis and synthesis doing duty as Father, Son and Holy Ghost) while really believing in nothing except the logic of events which has made the world what it is and not otherwise. To apply the name "God" to the world-process itself is to deprive the word of any specific meaning; and its continued use is purposeless except as a camouflage for intellectuals who believe in free-thought for themselves, but in religion for everybody else.

By the nineteenth century, in fact, religion in Europe had become intellectually out of date. But it remained indispensable to the ruling classes as an opium for the people. Still more is this the case today. Anyone who doubts this judgment may verify it by studying the religious half-column published every Saturday in The Times, in which one traditional dogma after another (the ascension, the second advent, the last judgment, the life of the world to come) is explained away for the benefit of the "top people" who take that paper —the literal meaning demolished and a string of words substituted which on logical analysis means nothing at all. Or he may save himself that trouble by asking any Christian capitalist to reconcile the Gospel injunctions—"resist not him that is evil"; "love your enemies"; "lay not up for yourselves treasures upon the earth"; and "judge not, that ye be not judged"—with production for profit, retributive punishment and nuclear warfare. Simple people who have not thought the question out may sincerely believe the traditional creeds. But so far as its bourgeois upholders are concerned, the religion established and endowed by law, taught in publicly maintained schools and broadcast on the radio today is organised hypocrisy.

The bogus character of established religion was already evident—though not so evident as today—when Hegel prostituted his philosophy in its defence. History was proving in forcible fashion that nothing stayed put. Side by side with the French Revolution and its

sequel went the industrial revolution which temporarily made Britain the workshop of the world, but which put questions to the bourgeoisie that all their philosophy could not answer. To the mass of misery and revolt following on unregulated industrial capitalism the ruling class reply was either to proclaim the unfettered pursuit of personal profit an automatic recipe for the greatest happiness of the greatest number, or—as this was not evident to the "greatest number" of those concerned—to refurbish in the service of social order those dogmas of "revealed" religion which the theoreticians of the bourgeoisie had for more than a century been busily undermining. From the French Revolution onwards Evangelical Christianity (till then derided as Methodist cant) became respectable in England and even fashionable. Shrewd foreign observers declared that Methodism had saved England from revolution. The interests of the working class, which by this time, at least in Britain and France, were visibly opposed to those of the bourgeoisie, demanded that the bluff should be called.

Only here and there as yet did individuals—Owen in Britain, Saint-Simon and Fourier in France—perceive that the remedy for social ills lay not in reviving a moribund religion, but in building a co-operative commonwealth adapted to large-scale production and distribution. To Owen's followers we owe the word "Socialism"—a fact worth pondering by those who would trace to Methodism the origin of British Socialism. To Owen and his fellow-Utopians belongs the credit of having put their finger on the problem. But they did not know how to solve it.

Hegelian philosophy, as we have seen, served Hegel himself and many of his followers as an intellectual excuse for supporting the established order and its official religion. But not all Hegelians were so compliant. A philosophy of history which saw in the past an inevitable progress from the old order to the new and from the new to the newer could obviously be applied with revolutionary results to the present and future by anyone not inhibited by personal interest or a professorial! post. Carlyle, idealist though he was, put the case in the closing pages of his French Revolution in words that today sound

prophetic. "Sansculottism[121] . . . still lives; still works far and wide, through one bodily shape into another less amorphous, as is the way of cunning Time with his New- Births:—till, in some perfected shape, it embrace the whole circuit of the world!"

This was written in 1837. In a few years two materialists showed how the idealist's prophecy was to be fulfilled.

3. *Marxism in Theory*

In 1844, when industrial capitalism was completely victorious in Britain and France, but had hardly scratched the surface of the greater part of Europe, two young "Hegelians of the left" Marx, who had been engaged in radical journalism in Paris, and Engels, who had been writing on the condition of the working class in England—made each other's acquaintance. Independently they had come to the conclusion that human progress, social, political and intellectual, depended on the victory and extension to other countries of the working-class movements then stirring Britain and France. During nearly forty years of collaboration they gave the working class and the world the new philosophy of dialectical materialism, and called the triple bluff of bourgeois religion, bourgeois philosophy and bourgeois political economy.

Marx and Engels called the religious and philosophical bluff of the bourgeoisie by pointing out that before people can think, let alone worship, they must live—that is, get food, drink, shelter, clothing and the other necessaries of life. But now begins the distinctive contribution of Marx and Engels to materialist philosophy. Man, they point out, acts on and changes the world to which he belongs. Ideas are part of the equipment by which he does so. History, therefore, is not a mere unfolding of ideas, but a series of struggles to change our world—struggles in particular between social classes for the product of human labour. The property relations prevalent in a society depend on the stage of development of its productive

[121] *Sansculottes* ("ragamuffins") was the name given to the artisan supporters of the Revolution in derision, and then accepted as a title of honour.

equipment. The legal, political, religious and other ideas current in a society depend in their turn on its property relations. "It is men who, in developing their material production and their material intercourse, change, along with this their real existence, their thinking and the products of their thinking. Life is not determined by consciousness, but consciousness by life."[122] Hence there is no eternal and immutable moral law or religious truth. Morals and religion are creations of concrete society.

Marx and Engels called the economic bluff of the bourgeoisie by proving from documentary evidence provided by the bourgeoisie themselves that the freedom of every man to buy in the cheapest market and sell in the dearest meant not the greatest happiness of the greatest number, but the increasing exploitation of the working class for the profit of the owning class, the increasing instability of the capitalist system and the inevitability of its overthrow by the workers of the world when they awoke to their situation. Against bourgeois economists who treated capitalism as a law of nature, Marx and Engels showed that it was a product of history doomed by its own contradictions to disappear.

Finally, by showing the historical connection between class society and religion, Marx and Engels proved the impossibility—whatever bourgeois free-thinkers might say—of abolishing religion without first abolishing class society and the helpless and hopeless ways of thought which it fosters in its victims. This is worth pondering by those present-day humanists who (like Bruno Bauer and the "critical critics" of Marx's day) think that they can eradicate religion by argument alone. Marx put the matter succinctly in his *Theses on Feuerbach*, "Philosophers have only *interpreted* the world in various ways; the point, however, is to *change* it."

In the lifetime of Marx and Engels their theory of class struggles as the motive force in history was reinforced by Darwin's demonstration that man himself, with all his characteristics, had evolved from an animal ancestry by natural selection in the struggle for existence. Darwin himself drew no political conclusions from his

[122] Marx and Engels, *German Ideology*.

theory. But incautious apologists for capitalism, then and since, have hailed the *Origin of Species* as a scientific justification of free competition. They fail to see that the Socialism to which they object is as much a response to environment as the capitalism which they approve. Man lives by co-operation: only so can he survive. The particular form taken by co-operation depends on historical circumstances. Given the struggle for existence, any human group uses the social, political and ideological weapons that suit it. Ancient slave-owners used the city-State, and when that failed them, the empires of antiquity, culminating in the great slave-empire of Rome. Feudal landowners used the Catholic Church and the divine right of kings. Capitalists use free competition and parliamentary government, but as events have shown, are equally ready, when and where it suits them, to use trusts, combines and fascist dictatorships. If the workers in their turn use trade unions, co-operative societies, Socialist and Labour Parties, Communist Parties, Soviet Republics and People's Republics, these are, one and all, weapons in the struggle for existence which prove their fitness by survival.

Since the closing years of the nineteenth century a favourite argument of the opponents of Marxism has been the alleged falsification of its predictions. Marx—the argument runs—deduced from his analysis of capitalist production that the rich would grow richer, the poor poorer, and the middle class be crushed out between the upper and nether millstones, until in the final crisis of capitalism "the knell of capitalist private property sounds," and "the expropriators are expropriated."[123] What are the facts? Statistics prove that the standard of living has risen. Trade unionism, co-operation and reformist legislation won by working-class organisation and struggle have raised wages, reduced hours and established social services unknown in the past. The middle class, far from being crushed out, become more numerous at every census. Since the predictions have been falsified, the analysis, it is argued, must be wrong, and Marxism can be relegated to the museum of exploded philosophies.

[123] Marx, *Capital*, XXIV, 7.

These criticisms arise either from a hearsay acquaintance with Marxism or from the memorising of one or two "purple passages" by those who have never followed the process of Marx's thought. He and Engels were well aware of the qualifications needed in applying their theory to particular cases. As early as 1858 Engels wrote to Marx that the exploitation of "the whole world" was leading in England to "a bourgeois aristocracy and a bourgeois proletariat as well as a bourgeoisie," and Marx anticipated that the extension of capitalism to new countries—Australia, the western United States, China, Japan—would postpone social revolution in Europe.[124] Obviously the creation of a "bourgeois proletariat" at home by exploiting new countries, so far as it succeeds (and it would be foolish to deny it local and temporary successes), is only robbing Peter to pay Paul. Marx never lived to finish *Capital*. But in the draft of a fourth volume, published by Kautsky after both he and Engels were dead, Marx expressly refers to that "continual increase in numbers of the middle classes," and its effect in increasing the "security and power of the upper class,"[125] which his critics accuse him of overlooking. As to political prophecy, in 1870—in the hour of German victory over France—Marx wrote: "What the Prussian fools do not see is that the present war is leading … inevitably to a war between Germany and Russia … A war No. 2 of this kind will act as the midwife to the inevitable social revolution in Russia."[126] Lucky accident or long-term prevision?

Far from exaggerating the catastrophic effects of capitalism, Marx and Engels in fact understated them. They saw that the industrialization of new countries would postpone social upheaval in Europe. They did not see—and could not see without a foreknowledge of the future development of warlike weapons—that the scramble of capitalist powers for colonies and concessions in undeveloped countries, the partitioning of Africa, the opening up of

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[124] *Marx-Engels Correspondence*, letters of 7–8 October, 1858.
[125] *Theories of Surplus Value*, cited by Bottomore and Rubel, *Karl Marx: Selected Writings*, Part III, 5.
[126] *Marx-Engels Correspondence*, Marx to Sorge, 1 September, 1870.

Asia, and the military rivalries and alliances thereby necessitated would be so many milestones to the most murderous war yet waged by civilized governments. (Lenin lived to see it and, besides his practical achievement, brought Marx and Engels up to date by developing Marxism to cover imperialism and world war.) They did not and could not see that the congenital inability of those same capitalist powers to make and keep peace, coupled with terror at the spectre of Socialism—now become concrete in the Soviet Union—would twenty years later cause a second world war more murderous than the first. They did not and could not see that those same capitalist powers, having by a second world war unintentionally ensured the spread of Socialism over one-third of the world, would to prevent its further spread prepare to murder half mankind! and to infect the rest with plague, pestilence and famine for untold generations. In short, Marx and Engels foresaw the breakdown of capitalism and the victory of Socialism, but did not foresee the criminal and even lunatic lengths to which the capitalists would go to prevent it. Marx's prediction of economic "misery, oppression, slavery, degradation and exploitation,"[127] preceding final revolt, pales into insignificance beside the deeds of horror which Christian capitalists have already done, and which they brag of their readiness to do again and outdo.

4. *Marxism in Practice*

It is against this capitalist record of the last fifty years that we must assess the Socialist record of the Soviet Union, eastern Europe and China.

Critics of Marxism (from the Jesuit Father Wetter to the older school of Rationalists) often say that Marxism is itself a religion as dogmatic as those which it seeks to supersede. Nor is the idea that Marxism is a religion wholly confined to its critics. Various writers who accept most of the Marxist positions have used the word "religion" to describe them. Belfort Bax—the friend of Engels and

[127] Even this is an understatement. As I write, Professor Kissinger of the U.S.A. talks glibly of "blowing up the world" in defence of capitalism.

Morris and in great measure a Marxist, though an idealist in philosophy—wrote a book (in some respects still valuable) called The Religion of Socialism, in which he contended that Socialism, though not religious in the other-worldly sense, had brought back religion from heaven to earth and equated it with the struggle for a higher social life. "In Socialism the current antagonisms are abolished, the separation between politics and religion has ceased to be, since their object-matter is the same."[128] More recently Dr. Hewlett Johnson, the Dean of Canterbury, has argued that Communism is not only religious, but reconcilable with Christianity, since both Christians and Communists believe in something greater than themselves which will eventually triumph. Christians call this something God and Christ; Communists call it history and working-class solidarity. "Both of us, Christians and Communists, operate in a common field of religion. For the field of relationships is the field of religion; the field of human relationships."[129]

Up to a point it is a question of terms. If anyone likes to call a firmly held conviction which moves us to action a "religion," we cannot stop him. But such a use of the word is confusing. If "religion" is to be used in this sense, we need some other word to describe Judaism, Christianity, Islam and the other religions usually so called. Historically, "religion" has been used to mean the recognition of a superhuman power or powers entitled to obedience. Marxism is a materialist philosophy. For Marxists our knowledge arises wholly from experience—from the world acting on us and from our reacting on the world. That being so, the super-
natural—a hypothetical being or beings beyond the world—is unknowable and on strict analysis unthinkable. To use the word "religion" to denote both supernaturalism and the rejection of supernaturalism is to rob the word "religion" of any useful significance.

However, the critics of Marxism have in mind more than mere terminology. They point to the authority accorded in Communist

[128] Bax, *The Religion of Socialism*, essay on "Socialism and Religion."
[129] Hewlett Johnson, *Christians and Communism*, XIII.

Parties to the writings of Marx, Engels and Lenin, to the belief in the historic mission of the working class, to the discipline accepted by Party members and to the power concentrated in the State wherever Communists govern. Having enumerated these, the critic exclaims: "A canon of scripture, a mystical faith, an infallible Church, an Index! What more do you want to make a religion? It might be Rome, save for the trifling difference that there is no God."

The answer to those critics who say that we treat the writings of Marx, Engels and Lenin as an infallible Bible is that we do not. We accept their writings in so far as they correspond with experience. It needs no revelation to know that people live by labour; that if they do not live by their own labour, they must live by that of other people; that in capitalist society the usual way of living by the labour of other people is to own the means by which they labour (or a share in it) and draw rent, interest or profit from it; and that as a matter of fact there has been and is a ceaseless struggle between the class who live by working and the class who live by owning—a struggle sometimes industrial, sometimes political, sometimes national, sometimes international. It needs no revelation to know that only the workers collectively, guided by right theory, can end capitalism and build Socialism—just as it needs no revelation to know that an army must be properly led and must fight in order to win. These Marxist positions are not inspired scripture. They are generalisations from experience to be tested in practice. If it entertains any critic to count the predictions by Marx which were not fulfilled, let him. I have pointed to some which were.

As to those critics who see a religion in the discipline accepted by Communists, I ask them whether they see a religion in the discipline accepted by the armed forces on service. Marxists are not mere debaters defending a theory. The world is not a debating society, but an arena in which men struggle for existence, and in which they may either join forces in a collective battle with nature or waste them in mutual war until nature finishes off the survivors by pestilence and famine. The twentieth century in two world wars has put the alternative to mankind. Marxists choose the first alternative—the

collective battle with nature, or as we say, building Socialism. Building Socialism is an operation in which efforts must be co-ordinated if we are to succeed. The Communist Party is "the most advanced and resolute section of the working-class parties of every country."[130] In this it resembles an army—not of conscripts, like other armies, but of volunteers. And, like an army, the Party too needs discipline. It asks of its members, however, not the unthinking submission which the Catholic Church imposes on believers, but the thinking co-operation necessary to success in a common enterprise.

A Communist Party is governed by a Central Committee freely elected by its members, and which the members can replace if they disagree with its policy. We do not consider any leader infallible. Nowhere in any Marxist classic—nowhere in Marx, nowhere in Engels, nowhere in Lenin, nowhere even in Stalin—is infallibility claimed. Communists support their leaders as an army in the field supports its generals—with this difference, that generals are not elected, and our leaders are. A fighting man on service does not think his officers infallible (his opinion of them may be unprintable!) but he does not mutiny in face of the enemy. Neither do we. It is a little naive of our critics to complain that we do not make them a free present of controversial ammunition.

I am not taking up the cudgels for Stalin or Rakosi. I know that these men were responsible for actions which did much harm to the Socialism I nevertheless think they were trying to serve and up to a point *did* serve. But does anyone imagine that people building a new society in the middle of a hostile world can renounce the use of force? The French Revolutionists, building a new bourgeois society in the face of feudal Europe, used force enough. Then, as now, the reactionaries lifted their hands in holy horror. Then, as now, half-hearted sympathisers with the Revolution scuttled to the enemy camp. We Communists are proud to be the heirs, not of the turncoats Burke, Wordsworth and Southey, but of plucky Tom Paine, himself a prisoner under the Terror, who died as he had lived, a Revolutionist.

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[130] Marx and Engels, *Communist Manifesto*.

IV RELIGION AND THE LABOUR MOVEMENT

1. *Background of the British Labour Movement*

In applying Marxist principles to the situation in Britain it is necessary to remember that Britain is the oldest capitalist country. Feudalism in England was blown sky-high by the Revolution of the seventeenth century. Its last living relics in Scotland—the feudal privileges of the Highland chiefs—were abolished after the rising of 1745. Thenceforth the British bourgeoisie were free to turn their energies from civil struggles to the exploitation of the advantages which they had won. The comfortable and comatose Church of eighteenth-century England sufficed to sanctify their proceedings while they got rich by the ruthless exploitation of the common people and of subject races. Those petty bourgeois sects—Baptists, Congregationalists, Quakers—which had broken away in the revolutionary period were cut off from the Establishment by barriers at least as much social as religious.

With the application of science to industry and agriculture went the growth of the proletariat. The Enclosure Acts of the eighteenth century converted the yeomanry into landless labourers or paupers, and drove them and their children by the thousand into the new cotton mills which the industrial revolution called to life. Before the end of the century the British Labour Movement was born—at first in blind revolt against the new machinery, in which the workers saw the immediate cause of their distress; then in combinations to regulate wages and hours, which the master class in 1799 found it necessary to forbid by Act of Parliament.

So far science had hardly begun to be applied to the investigation of human society, and what we now call a Marxist approach to its problems was not yet possible. Philosophy, history and political economy were ideological weapons of the bourgeoisie against religious dogmas which fettered their freedom of thought, or commercial restrictions which fettered their freedom of trade. No one dreamt that their lessons would ever be turned into weapons against

the bourgeoisie itself. Only after the French Revolution had shown that free-thought could not be confined to the bourgeoisie, and that free-thinking artisans could be very dangerous people—only after the writings of Tom Paine and William Cobbett had begun to circulate among the masses, and after Owen at New Lanark had founded schools on a secularist basis, did the ruling class begin to take an interest in popular education.

It would be ridiculous to say with Morgan Phillips that the British Labour Movement owes more to Methodism than to Marxism. Wesley himself was a Tory whose only complaint against the Church of England was its impotence to provide an opium of sufficient strength for the growing proletariat. His followers were forced out of the Church by no action of their own. As late as 1811, following a strike in the Northumberland and Durham coalfields, a Methodist preacher at Jarrow fulminated against the miners' union (illegal under the Combination Acts) as "unchristian and immoral." As late as 1819, the year of Peterloo, a conference of Methodist ministers at Bristol admonished the workers not to be led by "unreasonable and wicked men" into "political parties and associations" inconsistent with their "civil and religious duties."[131] J. R. Stephens, a leading Chartist and advocate of the ten-hour day in factories, had been a Methodist minister; but the Methodists had expelled him before he became a Chartist.

Yet the Methodists and other dissenting sects by the very fact of their separation from the Church of England were forced to rely for support on their own members and were therefore more amenable than the Establishment to pressure from below. The actual degree of self-government varied in different denominations. Baptist, Independent and Quaker congregations had been self-governing from the first. The Wesleyans, who had separated with the greatest reluctance from the Church of England, were far slower in admitting the laity to control of their affairs. The Calvinistic Methodists, following Whitefield rather than Wesley and flourishing mainly in Wales, adopted congregational self-government at an early date. Lay

[131] J. L. and B. Hammond, *The Town Labourer*, XIII.

initiative was the issue that led to the secession from the Wesleyans of the Primitive Methodists and the Bible Christians. This growth of democratic dissent frightened Parliament into voting a million pounds in 1818 to build Anglican churches, and half a million pounds in 1824 for the same purpose. Vilely as the bourgeoisie treated the workers' bodies in the first fine careless capture of industrial capitalism, they were not negligent of their immortal souls!

The upshot was that by 1827, when the Owenites coined the word "Socialism" to denote their objective of the common ownership of the means of production, British workers were acquiring the habit of public discussion in dissenting chapels as well as in trade union branches, and that the British Labour Movement, unlike its continental counterpart, grew up with a religious background. In 1830, when the agricultural labourers of southern England revolted against starvation wages, a Nonconformist or Methodist schoolmaster was sometimes found to speak for them—a clergyman of the Established Church never. Marxists must take account of such facts. To fail to do so and to put the fight against religion before the fight against capitalism is to fall into idealist error.

2. *Class Struggle and the Churches*

The correct Marxist approach to the matter is indicated in the writings of Lenin. There can be no abandonment of the materialist basis of Marxism. A Marxist party must oppose the State granting privilege to religion in any shape or form. We must expose the religious halo artificially surrounding the head of the State for what it is—an opium deliberately manufactured to stupefy the masses and to blind them to the squalid realities of class society. We must demand the disestablishment and disendowment of all State Churches; the secularisation of all publicly aided schools; the repeal of all legislation which, like the blasphemy laws, penalises people on religious grounds; and the cessation of religious broadcasts, except as part and parcel of debates in which religious and anti-religious speakers take part on equal terms. In making these demands we shall

have the support of some decent believers who do not share the common bourgeois assumption that the State should actively support religion.

But there is all the difference in the world between making such demands and wantonly repelling those believers who are with us in the fight against capitalism. "If a priest," wrote Lenin in 1909, "comes to co-operate with us in our work—if he conscientiously performs party work, and does not oppose the party programme—we can accept him into the ranks." True, Lenin considers such a case "hardly possible in Russia."[132] But if he could imagine such a case in pre-Revolutionary Russia, where the Church was part of the Tsarist State machine, much more does the argument apply in Britain, where ever since the Revolution of the seventeenth-century dissent from the State Church has been tolerated, where the Church itself has been extensively permeated by scientific criticism, and where an active minority (though never a majority) of the clergy have taken and are taking part in the struggle for Socialism and peace. We should be bad Marxists indeed if we refused the help of such men as Dr. Hewlett Johnson or Canon Collins for no better reason than that their beliefs do not square with dialectical materialism. The issue forced to the front by the capitalist policy of cold war—nothing less than the survival or destruction of mankind—is far too grave to be prejudiced by theoretical pedantry.

In short, we must put the class struggle first. The class struggle is not, as Tories and "revisionists" pretend, out of date. On the contrary, with the growth of monopoly capitalism the struggle has assumed a more tragic import than Marx and Engels envisaged: it has become a struggle for human survival. The demand of the workers of the world for a classless society has today to face, not the clumsy brutality of a Thiers or a Bismarck, nor the clever chicanery of a Chamberlain or a Churchill, but the desperate determination of big business tycoons and their political and military lackeys in the United States, Britain, Germany and France to destroy the world by mass

[132] Editors: The above quotes are from Vladimir Lenin's "The Attitude of the Worker's Party to Religion" (1909).

murder and suicide sooner than see that classless society emerge. That is the grim reality behind all the hypocritical talk of "containment" and "the great deterrent."

Now not all workers are Marxists. Not all even know what Marxism is. But all workers and a great many who are not workers—all indeed who are not financially, politically or professionally implicated in monopoly capitalism's drive to mass murder and suicide—wish to live and not die, and wish their children after them to live and not die. Mankind stands at the cross-roads between life and death. Anyone who chooses life and not death—anyone who fights against capitalism and war, its offspring—is our friend. If he has religious beliefs and likes to keep them, let him. We should not on that account refuse his help. If he is ready to work for the Party, we should not refuse him Party membership.

Anyone, on the other hand, who fights for capitalism and threatens the world with war in its defence, be he religious or irreligious, is our enemy. If we find in practice that the leaders of the Churches—popes, cardinals, archbishops and their kind—fight for capitalism and are ready to sanction even nuclear war in its defence, that is what as Marxists we should expect. In practice most capitalist States either have an Established Church of some kind or other—Catholic, Anglican, Calvinist, Lutheran as the case may be—or if for historical reasons they have not, nevertheless confer privileges on ministers of religion. The Church on its part corporately supports the State to which it owes its privileges and inculcates obedience to the government of the day.

The privileges conferred by capitalist States on the Churches in return for their support are exemplified in the history of popular education in this country. Until the nineteenth century neither the State nor the Church was interested in educating the people. In 1811, forced by the industrial revolution, the intensifying class struggle between capital and labour, and the consequent necessity of inoculating working-class children against dangerous thoughts, influential members of the ruling class founded a body called the National Society for Promoting the Education of the Poor in the

Principles of the Established Church. After 1832 Parliament voted annual grants to the National Society and to the much smaller and poorer British and Foreign School Society, which had been founded by Nonconformists. But these societies between them catered only for a small fraction of the population. Most children were not educated at all. Then in 1870 growing foreign competition with British industry, plus the fact that urban workers had just won the Parliamentary franchise, made it necessary to provide elementary education out of the rates, These "provided" schools were authorised to give religious instruction on condition that it was confined to doctrines assumed to be common to all Christians. The result was a dual system under which some children were educated in "denominational" schools provided by the Churches and subsidised by the taxpayers, and others in "undenominational" schools provided by the ratepayers. So it continued until 1902, when the further growth of foreign competition forced the State to provide not only elementary, but technical education. As a sop to the Churches, rate aid was now extended to their schools to enable them to hold their own in competition with those publicly provided. Finally in 1944 Parliament undertook to pay half the cost of maintaining denominational schools—a fraction now increased to three-quarters—and further required publicly provided schools to give religious instruction according to a syllabus agreed between local authorities and the Churches.

Thus, in a country of whose people only from ten to fifteen per cent, according to a Christian estimate, regularly attend any place of worship, and where Church leaders themselves admit the alienation of the masses from religion, more and more public money is voted for the teaching of a religion in which less and less people believe. Capitalists, whether they themselves believe the traditional creeds or not, believe their inculcation on the children of the workers to be an essential insurance against Socialism. The Trades Union Congress until 1912 used to demand a national system of education, free and secular, from the primary school to the university, but in 1912 under Catholic pressure removed the secularist plank from its

programme. It is a sign of the degeneration of Social Democracy that so many Socialists, in this as in other matters, woo the "floating vote" by acquiescing in capitalist policy.

Naturally Churches so privileged by the capitalist State trail in the wake of capitalist statecraft. The Church of England is the State's obedient auxiliary. Its bishops are nominated by the government. Twenty-five of them sit in the House of Lords and help big landlords and big capitalists to keep democracy safe for themselves. Episcopacy, like monarchy, is a fragment of feudalism which the bourgeoisie have adroitly adapted to their purposes and use to lend their rule an odour of sanctity and an air of pageantry that it otherwise lacks. This has not prevented a minority of lower clergy from throwing in their lot with the Labour Movement, or a few from even working with the Communist Party—to the grave scandal of their ecclesiastical superiors. But they are naturally a small minority.

The rôle assigned to the Church by the capitalist class was signally illustrated during the general strike of 1926. The Archbishop of Canterbury, Randall Davidson, cast himself for the part of mediator between the parties and, after consulting the Free Churches, appealed to the Tory Government to negotiate for a simultaneous cessation of the miners' lock-out and of the general strike which it had provoked. The Government refused even to allow him to broadcast his appeal. An attempt at mediation by a body of left-inclined Churchmen and Nonconformists, known as the Industrial Christian Fellowship, was rebuffed by the Government and ridiculed by the Press. There could have been no sharper reminder to the Church of her function as auxiliary policeman of the capitalist State. The attempt of William Temple during his short archiepiscopate (1942-1944) to engage the Church on the side of social change was censured by most defenders of the Establishment. Indeed, on Temple's death a Tory M.P. is said to have commented: "Thank God, we shall now have a Christian archbishop of Canterbury!" Temple's successor, the present archbishop, has shown the quality of his Christianity by publicly deprecating too much interest in the hydrogen bomb, since at its

worst, according to his Grace, it can only send some millions of us a little sooner to the next world for which we are bound anyway.[133]

The Catholic Church is an even more reliable buttress of capitalism than the Church of England. With the rise of monopoly capitalism has come a remarkable revival of Catholicism at the expense of other forms of Christianity. This is no accident. Ever since the French Revolution showed that the victory of the bourgeoisie over feudalism was merely the prelude to a new struggle between the victorious capitalists and the workers, the capitalist class have gradually forgotten their old quarrel with the Catholic Church and have sought its alliance against the new menace to class society. This trend was manifested in the Catholic revival within the Church of England; in the secession to Rome of Newman, Manning and many other clerics and laymen then and since; in Disraelian "Tory Democracy" with its rehabilitation of the monarchy and other feudal trappings of class rule; and in the tendency of bourgeois historians and novelists to whitewash lost causes of the past and to make out that revolution is always and everywhere wrong. In the nineteenth century, when the bourgeois revolution in Europe had yet to be completed, the process of reconciliation with Rome met with resistance among the bourgeoisie and was therefore difficult and slow. But in the twentieth, with Socialism victorious over one-third of the earth, the process has gathered pace. The Catholic Church with its international organisation is the natural ally of monopoly capitalism against international Socialism.

Even before the turn of the century the Catholic Church had cast itself for the part of saviour of capitalism from Socialism. In the Encyclical *Rerum Novarum*, issued by Leo XIII in 1891 and said to have been inspired by Manning, the Pope shakes his holy head at the dreadful class struggle between capital and labour, and admonishes both to behave themselves. Of course he can have nothing to do with Socialism: that is robbery. The landlord is entitled to his land, the capitalist to his capital. (The Pope could say no less.) But the landlord

[133] To his credit it must be added that Dr. Fisher has now endorsed Khrushchev's proposal for total disarmament. It remains to be seen this is a lasting conversion.

and the capitalist must be generous, give to charity and pay a living wage. Thus the Pope contrives to appear neutral in the class struggle, leaving the capitalist to acclaim his thunder against the Red Peril, and the worker (if not seduced by agitators) to touch his cap gratefully for his "charter."

Forty years passed. The First World War was won and lost. Out of it came the Russian Revolution. Out of the fear of Socialism came the Fascism of Mussolini and the Lateran Treaty, which compensated the Pope for the loss of his temporal power and set up the Vatican State. Then in 1931, in the Encyclical *Quadragestmo Anno*, Pius XI wrote the sequel to *Rerum Novarum*. A living wage must be paid; but due regard must be had to the state of business, which must not be ruined by excessive wages. (Those were the days of the great depression.) Favourable attention is drawn to the "corporative State" of Mussolini, in which strikes and lockouts are forbidden and Socialism is suppressed as it should be. "Socialism, if it really remains Socialism, cannot be brought into harmony with the dogmas of the Catholic Church." For Socialism "affirms that human society was instituted merely for the sake of material well-being," whereas "true social authority … is not based on temporal and material well-being, but descends from God alone, the Creator and last end of all things … No one can be at the same time a sincere Catholic and a Socialist properly so called."

After all, one good turn deserves another. The Lateran Treaty earned a pat on the back for Fascism. Wherever capitalism continues, the Catholic Church will offer its aid in keeping the exploited masses ignorant, devout and docile, and will claim its pay from the capitalists in privilege and protection from attack. Any State that is ready to pay for the Church's aid—as most capitalist States are—is sure of a papal blessing. Any State that has no use for the Church's aid—and Socialist States naturally have none—is sure of a papal anathema. A world so scientifically organised as to need no opium for its people would be fatal to the Church. Against it the Papacy will fight to the last ditch.

This does not mean that Marxists should refuse the co-operation of Catholics in struggles for wages and better conditions, as well as against dangers such as nuclear war which threaten our common humanity. We should welcome such co-operation, whoever offers it. But we must face the fact that it is in the last degree unlikely to be forthcoming from the Catholic hierarchy, and that any lay Catholic who offers it will do so at the risk of ecclesiastical censure. The fact that he incurs that risk will raise him in our estimation and make his co-operation the more welcome, but can only underline the contradiction between his faith and our philosophy.

3. *Conclusion*

In short, the Marxist attitude to religion follows from the Marxist analysis of society. In the words of the *Communist Manifesto*, "the history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles." The last class struggle, that between the capitalists and the workers, has in the twentieth century reached a climax. The capitalists (as Marx and Engels foresaw in 1858) have headed off revolution in their homelands only by exploiting colonial peoples. This (as Lenin showed) has meant fighting colonial wars and, when necessary, world wars for the acquisition or retention of colonies. Up to a point this has been profitable to the bourgeoisie. It has paid them in colonial dividends and war profits, and has divided the working-class parties who might have menaced their rule. But now has come a point when world war means suicide. World peace on the other hand means the end of capitalism. There is no exit from the dilemma for the bourgeoisie. They are accordingly trying to stave off a decision by a device christened "cold war," which means perpetually preparing for a "hot war" which they know would destroy them, but dare not renounce, since war preparation alone keeps their economy going.

Whoever practises or publicly defends this dangerous and deadly fraud is an enemy of the human race, without common honesty or common honour, and to be fought with no holds barred. It matters not whether he is religious or irreligious, except for one thing. If he

is a professing Christian (as most cold warriors are) he must be a measureless hypocrite. Christians believe, or profess to believe, that God incarnate once walked the earth and taught his disciples: "Agree with thine adversary quickly. Resist not him that is evil. Love your enemies. Judge not, that ye be not judged." Professing Christians who stock-pile nuclear weapons, who brag of their ability to exterminate millions of the human race in nuclear war, and who smear advocates of disarmament as "starry-eyed idealists," "fellow-travellers" and "security risks" are obviously hypocrites of a species which neither the Old nor the New Testament contains language to characterise. As Dante wrote of another sort of political humbug, *Non ragionam di lor, ma garda e passa*—"Let us not speak of them, but look and pass."[134]

I come now to those believers who are ready to co-operate with us in demanding nuclear disarmament, total disarmament by agreed stages, and those economic changes which will be necessary to reconcile mass production with a world at peace—changes impossible without a planned economy or, in a word, Socialism. With such believers we shall not quarrel about their beliefs. As J. B. S. Haldane says: "It is quite possible to use events which are known to be mythical as a vehicle for real emotion . . . Religious people are quite justified in using language as a vehicle for group emotions with a view to subsequent action. In fact that was the original use of language."[135]

Our attitude, therefore, to religious people will depend on the kind of action which they use religious language to promote. If they use it to promote anti-Socialism and war, they are enemies. If they use it to promote Socialism and peace, they are friends, even though we prefer to-use other language. As long as the battle for peace and Socialism is on, we have no time to quarrel over words.

Other considerations arise when a Socialist State is actually in being. Certainly a Socialist State can tolerate no inquisition into

[134] Dante, *Inferno*, III.
[135] *Rationalist Annual*, 1943.

private opinions.[136] That does not mean that a Socialist State can be expected to assist in the inculcation or propagation of religion. As Haldane says in the passage quoted, language is not only "a vehicle for group emotions," but also "a vehicle for statements of fact … If the words used in religious ceremonies are taken as statements of fact they will lead to false beliefs and wrong actions. Many of these words, but not all, will lead to the wrong kind of emotions as well, and hence have no justification whatever." This consideration is paramount when it is a question of instruction in State schools or talks in State radio programmes. To ask a Socialist State to give religious instruction in its schools or to broadcast religious talks on its radio is to ask it to educate its people, not in facts that will help them to play their part as citizens, but in beliefs incapable of verification and incompatible with the scientific outlook on which the life of modern society depends. For a Socialist State to prohibit religious teaching would be inquisitorial and undesirable; but to ask a Socialist State to provide or assist religious teaching is unreasonable. A Socialist State here and there may have to concede such assistance as part of a political compromise; but such concessions should be recognised as tactical, and not advocated where they are not necessary.

We come back in the end to the materialist basis of Marxism. Just as the working-class struggle against capitalism is the consequence and completion of the capitalist victory over feudalism, so Marxism, the theory of the class struggle, is the consequence and completion of the materialist philosophy expounded by the great bourgeois thinkers of the eighteenth century. Those thinkers, voicing the protest of their class against feudal privilege, concentrated their main attack on the greatest feudal power of all, the Catholic Church. To divine revelation, interpreted by priests and enforced by kings, they opposed human interest—conceived after their bourgeois fashion as the interest of free and independent individuals entering

[136] To represent the hard-hitting criticism of Boris Pasternak by other Soviet writers as an inquisition into his private opinions is a typical piece of bourgeois hypocrisy. Pasternak has suffered nothing except hard words—which proverbially break no bones.

into a contract for their mutual advantage. Marxists endorse the bourgeois opposition to priestcraft and kingcraft—indeed we are more faithful to it than the bourgeoisie have been. But Marxists point out that the human interest to which appeal is made is not the interest of free and independent individuals, but the interest of opposed classes struggling for the product of human labour. The capitalists have stepped into the shoes of the feudalists, and now use priests and kings as pieces of pageantry to bamboozle the masses. The militant workers, led by Marxists, now turn against the capitalists political and intellectual weapons taken from their own armoury.

It is unthinkable that Marxists should abandon the theory of dialectical materialism which has proved so serviceable a tool in the interpretation of the past and in the shaping of the present and future. But in applying it at particular times to particular countries account must be taken of historical and local conditions. Two considerations apply especially to Britain.

Firstly, industrial capitalism was firmly established in Britain, and the Labour Movement was already born, before any Socialist theory was formulated. Hence the British workers were influenced, and to a diminishing degree are still influenced, by religious sects which broke away from the Establishment in the Revolution of the seventeenth century or in the Methodist movement of the eighteenth. Socialism, therefore, from the time of Owen onward was bound to be handicapped, and in fact has been handicapped, by direct attacks on religion. Every Marxist must of course be ready, if challenged, to give an account of his philosophy. But in the absence of such a challenge the battle with religion is best left to organisations whose primary purpose is to fight it.

Secondly, as Marx and Engels foresaw, the colonisation of backward countries has enabled the capitalist class in Britain and elsewhere to share its gains with a section of the workers and so to postpone social revolution. But this has been possible only at the price of many colonial wars, two world wars and the threat of a third. Capitalist crisis has not ended; but its nature has been transformed. The centralisation of capital has led to revolution and Socialism in

one third of the world, but also to a deepening and widening international tension which threatens to bury capitalists and workers alike in a common ruin.

This threat offers Socialists a unique opportunity to mobilise the workers in all capitalist countries against a ruling class who have degenerated from mere thieves and cheats into homicidal and suicidal maniacs, It also offers a unique opportunity to win to Socialism sincere believers whose religion is not a mere social and political convenience. Do they believe in peace on earth? Do they believe that treasure should not be laid up for private greed, but that food, drink, clothing and the other good things of life should be provided by the labour of all for the use of all? Or do they believe in mouthing Gospel texts while the rulers whom they have elected stock-pile the means of mass murder and suicide? If these believers are sincere, let them join forces with Marxists for peace and Socialism. They may call it the kingdom of God on earth; Marxists call it the co-operative commonwealth. What matter names, if we mean the same concrete things?

In this way Marxists can stop the "revisionist" rot that set in before 1914 and has ever since tied Social Democracy to the chariot-wheels of capitalism and war, and can make the Labour Movement militant once again. In this way Marxists can help to put a Labour government in power, not on a programme of watered-down Toryism, but with a mandate to achieve the ends for which the Labour Movement exists—Socialism and peace.

THE TWO CAMPS

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[Editors: This was an excerpting of eight letters that Robertson wrote to Guy Aldred on various topics, and which Aldred edited and strung together shortly before Robertson's death]

(Conclusion of letter dated, July 20, 1959)

I never met Shaw, but I found that his books said for me in a crisp, telling way what Y had fumbled after without clear formation I particularly treasure The Quintessence of Ibsenism, Widowers' Houses, Mrs. Warren's Profession, The Devil's Disciple, Man and Superman, John Bull's Other Island—and the prefaces to all these plays, especially the last, with its eye-opening exposure of Denshawai.

Certainly Shaw made mistakes. Who doesn't? He was terribly wrong about Mussolini and (at first) about Hitler. That was because, I think, he never understood the class struggle and had apparently never read further than the first few chapters of Marx (which are bound to be unconvincing until you read on and see the qualifications he makes in his first generalisations). Shaw seems to have impatiently put him down and said, "I can do better than that!"

And not to see the class struggle is dangerous to any Socialist.

All this I grant. But to drag in Shaw's sexual life (I wonder whose would bear photographic exposure!) is, I submit, an irrelevance. What consenting adults do is their own affair.[137]

However, this doesn't alter my basic agreement with you on living issues of today.

You remind me at times of Ibsen's character in The Wild Duck, Gregers Werle. You remember the "infernal dun who comes to

[137] Editors: Judging by this comment and his previous comments on *The Well of Loneliness*, it seems probable Robertson was at the very least in favor of decriminalizing relationships between queer couples.

people's doors with the claim of the ideal," and will have truth, truth, truth in season and out of season, whatever is mucked up in the process!

July 23, 1959

Thanks for the two bound volumes of *The Word*. I was pleased to see you put up a persevering fight for the Rosenbergs in '52-3.

As we differ strongly over some things, among others our estimate of Shaw, I am enclosing a proof copy (which you needn't return) of my collection of lectures and articles which came out in '54. (I have only one bound copy and need it.) The last essay deals with Shaw. I don't suppose you've seen the booklet, as it doesn't circulate much outside the RPA. However, it has been translated into Russian and is also coming out in Czech.

I don't think Shaw plagiarised from you in his exposure of Denshawai. I very much doubt if he even read *Justice*. By 1906 the Fabians and the S.D.F. had drifted very far apart, and few of them read each other's papers! Shaw's exposure professes to be based on Government White Papers issued on the case; and as his preface was not published till 1907, the year after Denshawai, I think that very likely. Anyway, Shaw opened my eyes. The fact that you didn't open them first is probably due to the fact that I was not a regular reader of *Justice* till late in 1906, when you had ceased to contribute. I don't in fact remember reading any articles by you in those days.

I don't see that Shaw was guilty of any humbug over Sex, or that he was in any way comparable to Aveling. I have never heard that he tricked anyone as Aveling tricked Eleanor Marx. Say that Shaw had free relations with May Morris and (I have also heard) with Florence Farr. Were they any worse? They both went into it open-eyed. I never saw May Morris, but I heard Florence Farr lecture long after she and Shaw had broken it off, and I'll say she struck me as able to take care of herself.

Your estimate of Shaw is not shared by any of those who had to do with him personally. (I never had.) It is, curiously enough,

identical with that of my bigoted Tory and C. of E. parents, who, I remember, used to denounce Shaw as a destroyer of morals— almost, but not quite as bad as Oscar Wilde! Chesterton, who was most opposed to Shaw's views, nevertheless paid a high tribute to his integrity.

Otherwise we agree so much that there is not much to say. I think Trotsky was dangerously wrong in going for "world revolution" before the USSR had built up its own economy. His policy asked for disaster. As a Russian woman put it to me some time in the '30s, "We could have followed Trotsky, but we should have starved." As against him Stalin was right. (A parallel here exists with the French Revolution. Brissot and the Girondins wanted to spread the Revolution over Europe before it was completed in France. They actually led France into war. Robespierre opposed them and was right in doing so. I have previously compared Stalin to Robespierre; and the parallel holds good here—except that fortunately Trotsky was not allowed to declare war on the capitalist world! The USSR thus gained time to build Socialism.)

I gave your memoir of Bakunin to Ernie Keeling, who is glad of reading matter. What with ill-health and his record, he is not likely to get work.—No, the CP is the wrong shop to come to for a "career"!

July 25, 1959

Thank you for two letters of 23rd and 24th.

We shall obviously never agree about Shaw. I go by his writings, which I read diligently (all I could get hold of) from 1906 to his death—over 40 years—and also by the opinion of people who knew him and admired him. You are content to waive all these aside and to go by a personal slight you received 50 years ago! and by some matters of sex!

Norman (with whom I disagree in many ways) at least *knew* Shaw. Chesterton knew him and violently disagreed with him, and yet admired him. I think Chesterton was a muddled thinker and the dupe of his own verbosity, but personally honest, and I take his word

about people whom: he himself knew—not about anything else. He had no Motive to flatter Shaw. He disagreed with him and wrote a whole book to say so. Yet he admired him and remained a friend of his. Such testimony is important.

Bertrand Russell is rather different. I think he has never shaken himself free from his aristocratic background. He is clever and says many acute things, but is utterly incapable of team-work, and values his own cleverness more than any cause. At least this was true until lately. I think the nuclear menace woke Russell up from his egoism, as it woke up others. *Now* it is more important to use him, for what he is worth, than to criticise his past.

I think the Fabians in their day did much good, but also much evil. They were great at assembling facts. The Webbs' work on trade unionism was invaluable—Lenin translated it into Russian. But the Webbs and all the Fabians suffered from one fatal illusion—they thought that by being very civil to the capitalists they could persuade them, to give up capitalism! Of course they couldn't; and in the end the Webbs, to their credit, admitted that the USSR was *doing* what they had only been *talking* about.

As for the present-day Fabians, my contempt equals yours.

Lenin summed up Shaw as: "a good man fallen among Fabians." Not a bad summary!

I think when the USSR was in a state of siege (as it was from the war of intervention right on to the late war) it was necessary as an emergency measure to destroy Trotsky's dangerous influence. His exile was justified. It was also justifiable to destroy politically Zinoviev, Kamenev and Bukharin. In a state of siege you can't have divisions in the garrison. But it was going too far—it was mere mad panic—to shoot them all, and I am glad that Kamenev and possibly others have been rehabilitated. (I saw his grave outside the Kremlin, but not the others'.) In revolutions these things happen. I had not soaked myself in French Revolutionary history for nothing. I think (as J. B. S. Haldane does) that Stalin did a good job in building Socialism. But I think he paid an unnecessary price. Marx said the

Reign of Terror in France was a "reign of the terrified." So it was in Russia.

As to "yes men"—every army consists of "yes men" when on active service. We are an army (you have used the word yourself) in this crisis. I think we of the CP were justified in keeping to ourselves any misgivings we had about affairs in the USSR. After all, we were not running the USSR—our concern was with British policy and still is. A questioner in my audience at Conway Hall once asked me, "Why do you never criticise Russia?" (My lecture had had nothing to do with Russia, but was on some other subject.) I answered, "Because I live in England and not Russia, and if I did criticise Russia, nothing I said would make the smallest difference, whereas what I say about Britain may, I hope, make a difference to some people in Britain."

Of course I have nothing to say for those people who came into the CP and left it again and are now "sitting pretty." But I know other comrades who don't answer that description. By and large, my experience during 20 years in the CP is that the average member (usually a quite ordinary wageworker or his wife) is decent, comradely, loyal to his or her class, and a good fighter in any working class fight that happens to be on. (In fact, I sometimes feel ashamed of my own lethargy compared with their energy.) That of course is why the Tories and the Labour careerists (in the true sense of that word) hate the CP as the devil hates holy water! and why, after killing us and pronouncing us dead time after time, they still attribute all working class militancy to "Communist infiltration." They could pay us no greater compliment. I wish we always deserved it!

For practical *present* purposes we seem to be in agreement.

Best wishes.
Yours fraternally,

Archibald Robertson

SEVENTY-FIVE YEARS

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When this article appears I shall be within a few days of my seventy-fifth birthday. I am one of a dwindling remnant who can remember the reign of Victoria and the last premiership of Gladstone. (Children of that day were told to bite their food well because Mr. Gladstone owed his longevity to taking thirty bites at every mouthful!) Not that my background was otherwise Gladstonian. My family were Tories—indeed, we had a tradition that a Robertson ancestor had died in gaol at Carlisle while waiting trial for his share in the Jacobite rising of 1745. However, though my father spent much trouble trying to establish descent from this worthy, he never succeeded. Be that as it might, we were of the Establishment. All normally good people were Tories: to be anything else marked you as peculiar. In religion we were Church of England without any "high," "low" or "broad" label, though my youthful reading of English history made me definitely a Protestant. I swallowed the Bible, hell-fire and all, and until my fifteenth year never had the slightest doubt of the truth of all that I had been taught. I remember picking up one of the cheap reprints of the R.P.A. (Laing's *Human Origins*) and putting it down in horror on discovering the infidel nature of its contents.

Picking up one day an open book in my school library, I found it was a history of the French Revolution (I completely forgot whose). Well written history has always attracted me: I fell for the Revolution at once and was soon dipping into Carlyle, Lamartine, Mignet andMorse Stephens. The effect was to make me realise that the ideals on which I had been brought up were not the only ones for which men could live and die. You cannot suddenly discover that people whom you thought to be enemies of God and man are human beings, and rather fine fellows at that, without a considerable shock to your original beliefs. So it befell that in the light of my new faith my old faith melted away. What put the lid on it was my reading about the

same time of Shelley's *Queen Mab* (with its devastating notes) and Draper's *History of the Conflict between Religion and Science*. I became at the same time a democrat and republican in politics and an atheist and humanist in philosophy. Finally, in my last months at school, I read Belfort Bax's book of essays, *The Ethics of Socialism*. Here I found the thread which tied up republicanism, atheism and humanism into a consistent whole.

It was an exciting time to get interested in politics. The general election of 1906 (soon after I had gone to the university) swept the Liberals into power with a bumper majority and returned a Labour Party of thirty members independent of both the older parties. I plunged into Blatchford's *Clarion* (the first Socialist organ I had ever seen), and *Labour Leader*, *Justice* and the *New Age*, and made the rather bewildering discovery that the Labour and Socialist movement was deeply divided against itself. This was strange to me. To the Tory Anglicans among whom my boyhood was spent it was bad enough to be a Liberal: to be Labour stamped you, in the absence of evidence to the contrary, as an ignorant raucous denizen of the gutter. Surely in going Labour I had gone so far to the left as I could go! But no: to the left of the Labour Party was the old Social Democratic Federation and its organ, *Justice*: and to their left again was the self-styled Socialist Party of Great Britain, the direct actionists and the anarchists. It was all very odd. To me at that time it seemed silly, if you were a Socialist, not to be in the Labour Party. If organised labour could not be led in the direction of Socialism, how much less could the unorganised mass outside? In reasoning thus I was nearer Marxism than I knew. Long before my time Engels had censured the S.D.F. on exactly that ground.

I would not have it thought that I ignored the case against Socialism. I read *Socialism: Its Fallacies and Dangers*, by Frederick Millar, a member of the R.P.A.; many of the writings of W. H. Mallock; and later the writings of Nietzsche. Millar indulged too much in malicious misrepresentation and vulgar abuse to impress me; Mallock completely failed to understand what he set out to attack (he attributed to Marx an ignorance of the function of management in

industry, of which a patient reading of *Capital* acquits him); and Nietzsche, though interested as a coiner of aphorisms, was too brimful of self-contradictions to be treated as a serious thinker.

On leaving the university I entered the Civil Service, not from any fervent wish to serve the state, but because I had to earn a living, and the Civil Service, while safe, seemed likely to leave me leisure and opportunity to follow my real interests in life. Had not Webb and Olivier written their Fabian Essays while in the Colonial Office? Actually I condemned myself for twenty-one years and more to lead a double life. A Civil Servant must not expose himself by any public action to the suspicion of insincerity in the discharge of his official duties. Otherwise he has considerable latitude. I remained in the Fabian Society, joined the I.L.P. and sailed so near the wind as to speak at open-air meetings in London until pulled up by my official superiors. Among my personal acquaintance of those days were Mrs. Bridges Adams, an indefatigable but, alas! Sadly sectarian worker for popular education; J. F. Green of the Peace and Arbitration League, who kept open house for Socialist friends and regaled them with good cheer, good music and good conversation; and, through Green, Dan Irving, later M.P. for Burnley, and Herbert Morrison, a canny little man in whom no one then saw the future leader of the L.C.C. and Labour Minister.

My position at the Admiralty exempted me from active service in 1914. None the less I had to think hard as to the attitude which Socialists as such should take to the war. I had no ready-made suit of ideas to put on. Ultimately it was the invasion of Belgium that decided me. Even if the worst construction were put on Britain's policy and the best on Germany's, Belgium at least (so I argued) was engaged in a war of self-defence. If that were conceded, it followed that Britain, even had there been no "scrap of paper," was entitled to help Belgium. Only a hundred per cent Marxist could have seen through the casuistry. But in 1914 few outside Russia had heard of Lenin. I resigned from the I.L.P. in 1914, as I could not subscribe to their unqualified pacificism; and I let my membership of the Fabian

Society lapse as their silence on the war issue seemed to me a confession of bankruptcy.

One illusion, which it took a dozen years of post-war experience to knock on the head, was the belief that this was a war to end war. The phrase was coined in all sincerity by Wells, and did more than any other catchword to keep those progressives, whom the invasion of Belgium had rallied to the Allied cause, of the same opinion to the end. Hence our bitterness at the time with the Bolsheviks. We thought the "war to end war" more important than the socialisation of Russia, little dreaming of years to come when the "war to end war" would be a ghastly joke, while the Soviet Union would go from strength to strength.

For some years after 1918 I tried to pursue the same impossible middle line. I found myself in general agreement with Belfort Bax, whose personal acquaintance I made in 1919 and continued until his death in 1926. It was my misfortune that I met him too late. When I wish to picture Bax at his best I think, not of the decrepit figure I knew, but of the boy of sixteen who in 1871 wept over the fall of the Paris Commune and dedicated himself to the religion of humanity; of the historian who showed that historical sense was not a monopoly of reactionaries; of the social critic who predicted Bolshevism thirty years before it came of the man, in short, who made me a socialist.

And then in 1930, like a roll of distant thunder, came the German elections which gave 5 million votes to the Nazis and showed the Second World War already on the horizon. When in 1931, after my father's death, I resigned from the Admiralty, I went out into the world already drifting to war. The "war to end war" had been a lie; the Bolsheviks, therefore, had been right. I decided to visit the Soviet Union.

I was well aware of the stock objections—"they will only show you what they want you to see," etc. I had used them myself in my Social Democratic days of the few enthusiasts who visited the Soviet Union at that early period. But they did not deter me from going. They merely ensured that I should visit Russia as far as

possible without illusions. As it turned out, it was nonsense to say that you were allowed to see only what you were shown. Any tourist was free, if he liked, to wander on his own instead of joining a conducted party; and some did.

I have paid, in all, seven visits to the U.S.S.R.—four before the Second World War and three since. Of the making of many books about the Soviet Union there is no end; so I will say little here. I recorded my first impressions in a philosophical dialogue published in 1933 and entitled *Philosophers on Holiday*. The disputants include pro-Soviet, anti-Soviet, and neutral tourists, who after much argument return with the same opinions with which they started.

Meanwhile the world situation approximated more and more to a nightmare. When I returned in 1938 from my fourth visit to Russia, the clouds were gathering round Czechoslovakia. The ovation that greeted Neville Chamberlain on return from Munich nauseated me. I felt ashamed and unclean. Only one thing remained to do—have at long last the courage of my convictions. Little by little I had pieced together a creed. It remained for me to implement it in practice. At the age of fifty-two I joined the Communist Party. In my seventy-fifth year I am in it still; and that is that.

In 1944 I was invited to lecture to South Place Ethical Society, and in 1945 was appointed a regular lecturer. No one asked me my politics; and I do not feel bound to answer questions that are unasked. I remained on the panel fifteen years. I suppose that is what some people call unscrupulous Communist infiltration. Actually on the Ethical platform I avoid propaganda for any party. But I never conceal my opinion that the real conflict of our day is between pre-scientific institutions, politely labelled "Christian civilisation," and scientific humanism, which on the political plane takes the form of international Socialism.

MARXISM AND CHRISTIANITY

Originally published in *Science, Class, and Politics*, no. 28 (Winter 1984): 32–40

[Editors: This work was published long after its initial writing. Robertson is known to have performed this lecture since the early 1950s at the very least. This is the earliest available print we could find.]

"Ever since the conversion of Emperor Constantine," writes George Thomson in *Æschylus and Athens*, "Christianity has been, in its official form, as distinct from revolutionary heresies, a religion of the ruling class; yet, like Orphism, it began among the proletariat and it retains to this day the marks of its humble origin. We still sing in the Mangnificat, forgetful of its social implications, 'The hungry he hath filled with good things, and the rich he hat sent empty away.' We still adhere to the doctrine of redemption, which originally connoted the action of a slave in purchasing his liberty. We still bend the knee before the Cross, which, like the Orphic Wheel, was once the symbol of a contemporary reality."[138]

The history of the evolution of Christianity from a workers' movement into an "opium of the people" has yet to be written.[139] Such a history is not to be expected cither from the professional theologian or from the old-fashioned Rationalist. The professional theologian sees in Christianity a divine revelation, the influence of which has been wholly for good; the old-fashioned Rationalist sees in it a combination of fraud and folly, the influence of which has been wholly for evil. Here the Marxist historian can do a useful job. He is accustomed to look for contradictions in his subject matter and to find in them no mere *reductio ad absurdum*, but a key to interpretation and a guide to action. In Christianity, therefore, as in everything else, the

[138] *Æschylus and Athens*, pp. 159–60.

[139] Editors: This shows this lecture was written prior to 1953 and the publication of his *The Origins of Christianity*.

Marxist will expect to find positive and negative elements, some which have made for progress and liberation, and others which have made for reaction and repression; and he will not be disappointed.

Christianity was an offshoot of Judaism. A historical appreciation of Judaism is therefore an essential preliminary to historical appreciation of Christianity. How was it that Palestine, of all countries in the world, gave birth to a religion which, in its ultimate development, proved to be the death-knell of the ancient world and the ideological harbinger of that medieval world from which our own has sprung? The answer to this question must be sought, not in metaphysical speculations about the "genius of the Semitic race," but in the material conditions of Jewish history. Palestine is the meeting-point of Africa and Asia. In antiquity it was the cockpit in which rival empires contended for mastery. If Egyptian armies invaded Asia, if Assyrian, Babylonian or Persian armies invaded Egypt, if Ptolemies fought Seleucids or Seleucids Ptolemies, Palestine bore the brunt of the shock. Hence, while the primitive tribes which inhabited Palestine were subject to the usual economic distresses attending everywhere the transition from barbarism to civilisation, they were subject in addition to the misery which always befalls peoples who occupy a "no man's land" between clashing imperialisms.

The result was twofold. The brutalities, deportations and enslavements attending successive conquests bred in Palestine, as they bred elsewhere, a mass hatred of the exploiting power. But, until the advent of Rome, the domination of one conqueror never lasted so long as to extinguish totally all hope of liberation. Hence the exploited masses in Palestine kept alive the spirit of revolt long after it had been trampled out everywhere else in the ancient world. The oldest literary monument of their struggle is to be found in the prophetic literature of the Old Testament. Early prophets like Amos are revolutionary poets or pamphleteers, inveighing against capitalists[140] who sell "the righteous for silver, and the needy for a

[140] Editors: This is an anachronism just as much as Thomson's use of "proletariat" for the ancient peasantry and workers was also an anachronism.

pair of shoes,"[141] and against priests who batten on the oppression of the poor. Naturally, their protests are conditioned by the ideology of their age. The principal exploiters whom they had to fight were priests. The supernatural pretensions of the priesthood had to be met by claims equally imposing. The spokesmen of revolt therefore invoked the god of their nomadic forbears, Jahveh, against the multifarious Baals and Astartes whose shrines were the strongholds of the exploiter. By degrees monotheism became the ideology of the movement. In the Pentateuchal law which became the nucleus of the Jewish Bible, and especially in Deuteronomy, the motives of monotheism and social justice are inextricably intertwined. Finally, in the later prophetic literature, the hope of liberation from exploiters, native and foreign, crystallises round the imagined figure of a kingly leader who will break the empires of the world in pieces and usher in a golden age of peace and plenty.

The reconstruction of early Jewish history is of necessity a hazardous operation. The Jewish records are the work of uncritical scribes and have been edited and re-edited in the interest not of historical truth, but of religious edification. From the time of Alexander, however, we have the advantage of knowing, not only what the Jews said of themselves, but what others said of them. Particularly instructive is the hostile picture painted by Tacitus early in the second century AD.[142] The chief count in his indictment of the Jews is their propagandist activity. They attract the dregs of society. They teach people to despise their country and their country's gods. They practise mutual aid among themselves, but are enemies of mankind. They are disgustingly prolific, and so fanatical that they despise death in battle or by the hand of the executioner. They refuse to honour kings or emperors with statues. In short, they are a dangerous secret society—a State within a State. This passage shows what it was to which the ruling class of the Roman Empire really objected. It was not that the Jews had a peculiar religion: the Romans were used to peculiar religions. It was that the Jews propagated their

[141] Amos 2:6.
[142] *Histories* 5.4–5.

religion. They refused to accept the status of one subject people among many. They looked upon their way of life as the ideal way of life, destined to triumph over the whole world, and on their god—Jahveh of the prophets—as the only god, destined to sweep the Grieco-Roman pantheon and priesthoods into the dust-bin of history.

Of course this was not true of all Jews. The class structure of society in Palestine was the same as elsewhere; and the richer Jews, especially the priestly aristocracy, found no difficulty in coming to terms with the Empire. Moreover, the Jews by now were not confined to Palestine. Scattered over the Mediterranean were colonies of Jews in very various circumstances—some, as at Alexandria, privileged and prosperous, others, like the Jewish colony at Rome, a by-word for poverty and squalor. In the diaspora, as in Palestine, the richer Jews put their Messianic hopes in cold storage and made the best of things as they were. But the poorer Jews everywhere were a rallying-point for revolutionary agitation. The Sibylline Oracles, in which the downfall of the existing world order and the advent of the Messianic kingdom are prophesied in rude hexameter verses, exemplify the kind of propaganda they conducted.

Christianity, as its name denotes, arose out of Jewish Messianism: "Christ" is simply "Messiah" translated into Greek. The first use of the word "Christ" (or its near equivalent) by a Roman writer is in the passage of Suetonius which records that the Emperor Claudius expelled the Jews from Rome because they "constantly made disturbances at the instigation of Chrestus."[143] That is, the poverty-stricken population of the Roman ghetto rioted in the belief that the deliverer had appeared. A few years later Suetonius records Nero's execution of "Christians, a class of men given to a new and mischievous superstition."[144] Messianism in any shape would be mischievous from the point of view of the ruling class; and if we take into account the fact that the propaganda of the new sectaries prophesied blessings to the poor, woes to the rich, the destruction of the existing order by fire, and the advent of the "kingdom of God" in

[143] *Claudius* 25.4.
[144] *Nero* 16.2.

place of the empire of *divus Caesar*, we need feel no surprise that it met with violent repression.

But Messianic propaganda was of interest to others besides the enemies and the custodians of established order. The richer or even the moderately well-to-do Jews, both in Palestine and in the diaspora, had an obvious interest in countering it. Left to itself, it would lead to a clash between Jewry and the Empire; and once that clash occurred, Rome was not likely to discriminate nicely between Jew and Jew.[145] From the point of view of the middle-class Jew of the diaspora it was necessary to stave off a clash at all costs. One way of doing so was to divert the movement into otherworldly and therefore innocuous channels. Many well-to-do Jews, like Philo of Alexandria, had studied Greek philosophy and were familiar with the Orphic doctrine, current in philosophical literature since Plato, that the body was a tomb from which the soul :could be released to eternal bliss by the practice of ascetic virtue. ; They were familiar too with the Stoic doctrine of the logos—the : divine reason which operated in the world and inspired men to virtuous action, and which they equated with the "word" of God which in Jewish mythology had created heaven and earth. If the masses of the Mediterranean cities could be persuaded that the Christ, the deliverer who was to redeem them, was no earthly king, but a divine being, and that the kingdom which they were to expect was not of this world, but above the clouds and beyond the grave, the revolutionary sting of Messianism would be drawn.

This is the propaganda with which we meet in the Pauline Epistles. It was pointed out by the Tübingen school of critics in the last century that the New Testament contains not one, but two brands of Christianity—the essentially Jewish doctrine of the Sermon on the Mount, and the very different doctrine of the Epistles. This is perfectly true. But the Tübingen school did not cast their net wide enough. For them, the difference between the two turned mainly on the question whether Christians were or were not bound to observe the Jewish law. That, in reality, was only part of a deeper and wider question, viz. whether the aspirations of converts were to be directed

[145] This is the argument put into the mouths of the Jewish Sanhedrin in John 11:48.

to a millennium on earth or to "pie in the sky." If the former, then the movement would be a revolutionary agitation based on Jewish Messianism, and a clash with Rome would be inevitable. If the latter, then Christianity might hope for an accommodation with the Empire, once the authorities were satisfied that it was free of any taint of treasonable aims.

Not only were the propagandas of Messianism and Pauline Christianity different, but the figures round whom they respectively centred were, to begin with, different too. One of the most puzzling features of the New Testament, on the assumptions of traditional Christianity, is the silence of the Pauline Epistles about the life and work of Jesus. Apart from a few brief touches which may easily have been interpolated, the "Christ Jesus" of the Epistles is not a man at all, but a god of the familiar "mystery" pattern who dies and rises again to confer "newness of life" on his votaries. He is not localised or dated, and his teaching is not quoted.[146] This is perhaps the most impressive of the arguments put forward by J. M. Robertson, Drews, Couchoud and their school for the wholly mythical character of Jesus. Yet when we turn to the Synoptic Gospels we get the impression, amid much that is obviously legendary, of another Jesus—one whom the writers nowhere call God and who nowhere calls himself God, who lived in a particular Roman province at a particular date and was executed by a well-known Roman procurator on a political charge. For those not gifted with the eye of faith it is difficult to see any connection between this Jesus and the Pauline saviour-god. We are evidently dealing with two different movements. If further proof of this is needed, it is to be found in the passages in which Paul (or the writer who uses his name) refers to some who preach "another Jesus, whom we did not preach,"[147] and anathematises those who preach "any gospel other than that which we preached."[148]

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[146] 1 Timothy, which *does* mention Pontius Pilate, is admitted even by professional theologians to be a forgery of the second century.

[147] 2 Cor. 11:4.

[148] Gal. 1:8.

Marxism teaches us to view such movements against their economic background. We should expect *a priori* that a movement which pinned its hopes to a catastrophic overturn of the existing world-order would appeal to the disinherited classes, and that one which tried to divert such hopes into other-worldly channels would appeal to those with something to lose. Our *a priori* expectation is borne out by the evidence. The party in the early Church who clung closest to Jewish Messianism and its millenarian hopes, and who rejected Paul as an apostate, were called Ebionites ("poor men"). They were especially strong in Syria—the part of the Empire in which traditions of the early movement might be expected to persist—and seem to have continued in existence until the rise of Islam. Pauline Christianity, on the other hand, from the first had moneyed supporters; and their money was a potent weapon in drawing the teeth of the revolutionaries. We read repeatedly in the New Testament of money collected by Paul and his associates for the purpose of relieving "the poor among the saints" and, no doubt, rendering them more amenable to the opium peddled by Pauline propagandists.[149] Whether these episodes are historical or not, there is no doubt that that was the reputation which the Pauline party had. They had money, but no mass following; the Messianists had the makings of a mass following, but no money. The correct strategy for the Pauline counter-propaganda to Messianism was obvious.

The diversion of Messianic propaganda into safe channels was naturally made easier by the ruin which overtook the Jewish revolutionary movements of the first and second centuries AD. After the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70 conversion to Judaism was forbidden on pain of death or forfeiture of goods. Pauline Christianity profited by the distress of Israel. The Gospels, which gradually took shape during the half-century or so after this, were edited and re-edited in an anti-Jewish sense—"rewritten three times, four times and many times," says the pagan critic Celsus, "in order to provide answers to objections." Thus every artifice is employed to shift the onus of the Crucifixion from Pilate on to the Jews—even to the point

[149] Acts 11:29–30, 24:17; Rom. 15:25–26; 1 Cor. 16:1–3; 2 Cor. 9; Gal. 2:10.

of improbably representing Pilate as finding "no fault" in a man who said he was king of the Jews![150] By the middle of the second century we find the Church completely severed from the synagogue, the Jewish people saddled for all time (in Christian eyes) with the guilt of deicide, and the apologist Justin protesting the loyalty of his co-religionists to that Empire which they had formerly execrated as "Babylon the great, the mother of harlots, drunken with the blood of the saints!"[151]

The victory of safe, other-worldly, Pauline Christianity over turbulent Messianism was accompanied and indeed made possible by a profound change .in Church organisation. This had originally been democratic. In the Teaching of the Twelve Apostles, a work dating from late in the first or early in the second century, we get a picture of primitive Messianist congregations which reminds us in some respects of the branches of a modern working-class organisation. Each congregation is governed by popularly elected officers ("bishops" and "deacons") answering to modern branch officials. The work of propaganda is done by travelling speakers ("apostles" and "prophets"), who receive hospitality, but are forbidden to take any other payment for their services. Congregations are warned against careerists ("Christmongers") who try to live on the movement. Of a professional clergy boasting "apostolic succession" there is here no trace whatever. But during the second century there is a change.[152] The elected officials come to be regarded as entitled to continuity of office—a phenomenon not unknown in modern Labour movements. In this way officialdom became a vested interest. Finally democracy disappeared, and the clergy, and above all the bishops, were regarded as holding office by divine authority transmitted to them from the first apostles. It is easy to see how this development facilitated the

[150] Luke 23:3–4.

[151] Rev. 17.

[152] The change seems to have begun locally even earlier. The First Epistle of Clement, usually dated about AD 96, scolds the Church of Corinth for "sacking" some of its officials. This Epistle contains the first extant statement of "apostolic succession."

repression of revolutionary tendencies and made possible eventual collaboration between Church and Empire.

The path of the collaborators was not smooth. The extent to which Messianism retained its hold on the rank and file is shown by the popularity of such a work as Revelation, with its lurid invective against Rome ("Babylon") and its vengeful visions of blood and fire. The leaders of the Church would gladly have excluded the book from the canon, but simply could not do so. For long, therefore, the imperial authorities continued to regard the Church as politically dangerous. But in the third century the Empire went to pieces so completely that desperate remedies were necessary. More than one emperor seems to have played with the idea of making Christianity a State religion. Finally, Constantine took the plunge and struck a bargain with the bishops. Froni leaders of a suspected and often persecuted movement they found themselves transformed into court favourites and pillars of society. In a very few years imperial authority was helping the bishops to define the "orthodox" Creed and to impose it, when defined, on those Christians who were inclined to kick against the new alliance of Church and State. Naturally, the Creed which received official approval consists of a string of Pauline and other-worldly dogmas, and leaves the revolutionary message of primitive Messianism severely alone.

Christianity has borne the marks of its dual origin throughout its history. On the very morrow of Constantine's establishment of the new religion, the slaves and serfs of Roman Africa raised the Donatist slogan, "What has the Emperor to do with the Church?" and began a revolt which lasted on and off until the fall of the Empire. During the Middle Ages the sect variously known as Paulicians, Bogomils, Cathari or Albigenses, appearing first in the east and later in western Europe, absorbed into its ranks various persecuted splinter-parties and provided a rallying-point for resistance to a Church which had become little more than a great feudal vested interest. The story of the suppression of the Albigenses in the thirteenth century is one of the bloodiest in medieval history. With the rise of the bourgeoisie at the end of the Middle Ages, dissentient Christianity acquired a more

definite political content. The Lollards and Hussites demanded the confiscation of the swollen wealth of the upper clergy on the ground that property might lawfully be taken away from unworthy holders, and that bishops and abbots by their worldliness and wickedness had shown themselves unworthy. The Reformation rallied to its banner, not only landlords and capitalists covetous of Church land and plain bourgeois resentful of priestly interference in daily life, but artisans and peasants demanding social equality in the name of the Gospel. By the second half of the sixteenth century we meet with sects which deny the Trinity, interpret the Bible allegorically, question the immortality of the soul, and hold that "all things come by nature." The revolt against the medieval Church was to know no halting-place short of modern materialism. Thus Christianity, working out its internal contradictions, ends by negating itself.

Just as the slaves and serfs of the Roman Empire evolved an appropriate ideology in Christianity, so the modern working-class movement has evolved an appropriate ideology in Marxism. The difference between Christianity and Marxism is such as we should expect between the outlook of a servile class without civil rights, political experience or scientific training, and a wage-earning class who by generations of struggle have won the right to organise industrially and politically, and who by the nature of their employment enjoy an increasing measure of education. For the slaves and serfs of antiquity the objective conditions of liberation did not exist; they therefore pinned their faith to an impossible miracle— the advent of the Messiah and the disappearance of the established order in a cosmic cataclysm. For the modern working class the condition of liberation is the intelligent use of the rights already won as weapons in the further class struggle which lies ahead.

The Marxist, therefore, can no more be a Christian than a modern astronomer can believe in a flat earth, a modern biologist in the chimera and the phcenix, or a modern jurist in witchcraft. But because the Marxist must reject the Christian ideology, it does not follow that he must regard all Christians as enemies of Socialism. That would be as foolish as the policy, censured by Marx and Engels

in the *Critique of the Gotha Programme*, of treating all classes but the working class as "one reactionary mass." In so far as the Churches are interlocked with the capitalist system and oppose the international working-class movement (as, for example, the Roman Catholic hierarchy from the Vatican down mostly does) they are our enemies and must be fought on every front, political and ideological. On the other hand, there are thousands of Christians, clerical as well as lay, whose economic interests range them with the working class, but who are linked to the Churches by family tradition, social ties and lack of scientific and historical background. It would be a gross error to antagonise them, as the old-fashioned freethinker too often does, by indiscriminate attacks and sectarian sneers. In dealing with them the Marxist will remember that Christianity has never meant the same thing to everybody. The Christianity of General Councils, Popes and cardinals, the Inquisition, the blasphemy laws, the Tory Party at prayers and General Franco is one thing; that of the Albigenses, the Lollards, the peasant revolts, the Levellers, Conrad Noel, the Dean of Canterbury and the average church or chapel congregation in an industrial district to-day is another. Many a professing Christian to-day is a good working-class fighter, but with an ideology a little out of date. He is a friend. The fight is the test, and if well fought, will itself in good time correct the ideology.

EXCERPT FROM *HOW TO READ HISTORY*

Originally published in *How to Read History* (London: Watts & Co., 1952), 238–39

Age cannot be compared with age by measuring the stature of their intellectuals. The criterion of progress in history is, when we think it out, the well-being of men and women in the mass, for the simple reason that without men and women in the mass there would be no intellectuals. To those who argue that the masses are a mere means for the production of an aristocracy of artists, poets, and thinkers, the answer is that the masses support artists, poets, and thinkers, and not vice versa; that if the masses withdraw their support, the game will be up; and that there is no reason why they should support artists, poets, and thinkers except in return for benefits received. History is the saga of men and women like you and me; of our age-long struggle to win a living from nature; of discovery and invention; of ignorance and superstition; of benefactors and betrayers; of exploiters and liberators; of defeat, the stepping-stone to victory; and of victory, the starting-point of new struggle. That the struggle is unending does not prove it vain. The very fact of struggle implies the existence of evil: in that sense evil is an ingredient of life itself. But the enemy which we fight is never evil in the abstract, but always some particular evil in the concrete. To those who combat it, the conquest of any particular evil is good. Good, therefore, is no less than evil an ingredient of life.

No one who reads the history and other literature of the ancient world in which the majority were slaves, or that of the medieval world (as distinct from modern romance about it) in which the majority were serfs, can doubt that the mass of men and women in our world have gained in concrete well-being more than they have lost. That gain is none the less a fact because the successful struggles of the past have left us face to face with new devils to fight—the devil of mass poverty where it still exists, the devil of mass ignorance and superstition, and the devil of total war with its weapons of mass destruction, to name no others. History should teach us that what man

has done, man can do—that as men and women like ourselves fought and overcame their ancient and medieval oppressors, so we, their children and heirs, have it in us to carry on the fight, to refuse to be destroyed by the work of our own hands, and to bequeath to our descendants new tasks to face and new worlds to win.

APPENDIX: TRIBUTES TO ARCHIBALD ROBERTSON

ARCHIBALD ROBERTSON: AN APPRECIATION

Originally published in *The Monthly Record* 67, no. 1 (1962): 5–6

It was my great privilege, as Secretary of the Society, to have regular, but not merely routine, exchange of letters with Archibald Robertson during his later years as one of our appointed lecturers. In our exchanges there was an awareness of being in personal partnership in a great enterprise—in an activity which we together took very seriously. Serious though he was, he *enjoyed* the challenge of the frequent address to be given at Conway Hall—the choice of a subject, the selection of a title (as brief as possible), the preparation and delivery of the discourse, to be outlined later in brief for *The Monthly Record*. And was there a "remainder," from his family inheritance, which seemed to give him particular satisfaction in conducting the Sunday morning meeting entirely on his own—even to the announcing of the opening hymn?

It is with true appreciation that we recall the carefully-prepared and scholarly addresses (always on matters of moment about which he thought and felt deeply), by means of which he made his own effective appeal to the intelligence and will of his hearers. His forthrightness, and his consistent integrity of thought and feeling, brought the issues under discussion to the point—so often to the sharpest point—and stirred the mind and moral sense of so many who were privileged to hear him over a period of fifteen years or so.

And Archibald Robertson's presence in itself brought a special quality of distinction and depth to every occasion of his attendance at our meetings and social gatherings. This was markedly the case at our Annual Reunion in September, when his many friends and colleagues were more than delighted to see him, and to hear his gracious response to the chairman's warm welcome extended to him and to Mrs. Robertson. It will not be forgotten that although in failing health, he, with Mrs. Robertson, made a special effort to come all the way from Oxford in order to meet with members and friends in happy

informality, and to wish the Society good success at the beginning of another season.

At the Annual Reunion (and significantly, we may say, in recent articles in *The Monthly Record*) Mr. Robertson made pointed reference to the fact that he had never been, by his own commitment, a member of the South Place Ethical Society—because he had never found himself to be in complete agreement with the Society's comprehensive and sympathetic approach to religion. He never disguised his own personal and complete renunciation of "religion"; he did not wish to have the term applied to him in any shape or form. For himself, he preferred the cultivation of an anti-religious sentiment. But although the Society could not wholly agree with his point of view, the invitation to deliver his lectures was given in good faith, and accepted by him in good faith; and it can be said that he did not abuse the privilege implied in the invitation and the acceptance. He knew quite plainly what the Society stood for, and so he did not, because he felt he could not, become a member. Since (as he thought) he could not "come in by the door," he would not "climb over the wall." He did not wish it even so much as to *seem* that he was working against the religious traditions and professions of the Society, from the inside, as a member. We should be grateful to have before us at this time the memory of an example such as his, brought so vividly to light in the deceased's last words to us, even in the shadow of death.

It is with profound regret that we realise now that Archibald Robertson will not be heard again at Conway Hall; but his influence will remain firmly as a part of "the story of South Place," and among us as the memory of one who was held in affection and high esteem, and who contributed so much to our common fellowship.

J. Hutton Hynd

ARCHIBALD ROBERTSON MEMORIAL

Originally published in *The Monthly Record* 67, no. 1 (1962): 6–8

A memorial meeting in honour of the late Archibald Robertson was held on Monday, November 27, in the Union Debating Hall, Oxford. Mr. Hector Hawton represented the Rationalist Press Association Ltd. and the South Place Ethical Society. Mr. R. Palme Dutt, Editor of the *Labour Monthly* and vice-chairman of the Communist Party, and Mr. Jack Dunman paid eloquent tributes to the political side of Robertson's career. He devoted himself unsparingly to the causes in which he sincerely believed and gained the admiration and respect of all who were actively associated with him. Although his individual existence might be ended, said Mr. Dutt, he lived on in the influence of the writings which survived him.

Mr. Hawton said that he first made Robertson's acquaintance at an R.P.A. Conference in Oxford. During the next few years, as secretary of the South Place Ethical Society, Mr. Hawton met Robertson regularly and their friendship ripened. Then they became fellow directors of the R.P.A. and established a new relationship as author and publisher. This continued until ill-health forced Robertson to retire from active life, though he still continued to write for *The Humanist*. His last contribution was a translation from a Soviet journal. It was a surprise to find that he had taught himself Russian, but characteristic of his modesty that he had never previously mentioned the fact.

"He never tried to make political capital out of his association with us." Mr. Hawton said. "He kept loyally within the area of common ground. In our personal relationship he sometimes showed a side that was not so apparent on the platform. He was an extremely sensitive man, and that is perhaps why some people felt he was rather aloof. His sensitiveness showed itself by the use of a pseudonym in his writings until the death of his father. It is, after all, a painful embarrassment to a dignitary of the Church of England to find his son

writing for rationalist and socialist publications—more so before the war than nowadays. Robertson was scrupulous in this respect that he was even a pseudonymous director of the R.P.A. from 1926 to 1932.

"I might also mention his love of literature, for which he was no dry-as-dust rationalist. He was particularly fond of Catullus and Lucretius, whom he translated. I have just seen a copy of the Chronicle of the Prep School he attended in Bournemouth. It records that in 1899 Robertson gained the top Winchester Scholarship, the Blue Ribbon of the Public School field, although he was a year under the maximum age limit. In offering this brilliant boy congratulations, the headmaster added: 'His future career will be closely watched, and his future successes duly written in the Chronicles of the Old Boys.' From Winchester Robertson won a scholarship to Trinity College, Oxford, and he gained a First in Greats. Then he went to the Admiralty where he remained until 1931.

"Even in his schooldays he rebelled against the traditional beliefs in which he had been brought up. Belfort Bax converted him to socialism and republicanism, but one of the influences that led him to atheism was Shelley's *Queen Mab*. His taste for poetry did not atrophy, as the opponents of rationalism sometimes claim must happen if we put too much trust in reason. It is typical of the range of his sympathies that he once told me that although he abhorred Newman's theology he was very fond of *The Dream of Gerontius*.

"I have lost a good companion and a staunch friend. The R.P.A. has lost one of its best authors and a stalwart champion. Of the many qualities he possessed the one that is perhaps the most outstanding was integrity. He was incorruptible. He feared nothing except the lunacy that threatened the world with nuclear annihilation. When I last saw him he knew that he had not much longer to live—but it was not on his own account that he was anxious. Indeed, if he had ever consulted his own selfish interests, he would have taken a very different direction."

At the conclusion of the meeting Mrs. Sylvia Robertson thanked the speakers and all who had attended to pay tribute to her

late husband. She had provided a display of Robertson's books, including many translations into Russian, Czech, Italian and Chinese. It was gratifying to see that the Oxford University Humanist Group was represented in the hall where, as an undergraduate, Archibald Robertson himself had often taken part in debates.

[No Author Listed]

THE LATE ARCHIBALD ROBERTSON

Originally published in *The Humanist* (December 1961): 356–57

The death of Archibald Robertson robs *The Humanist* of one of its most popular contributors and me of a personal friend. I first met him shortly after the War, when he was a regular lecturer of the South Place Ethical Society. Since then we lunched together regularly once a month until ill health stopped his visits to London. I have known him in many guises—as a lecturer, a fellow-director of the RPA, and an author. We did not always agree, but he didn't expect his rationalist associates to share his political views. In a way he felt more deeply about politics than rationalism, though to him they were two sides of the same coin. He thought religious beliefs were mythology and had difficulty understanding how intelligent men could hold them. The now fashionable line that what is false in a straightforward sense may be true in some new-fangled sense seemed to him sheer humbug. He expected his opponents to be as clear-headed as himself and did not realize how much he was asking. Although he did not suffer fools gladly, he was at heart a modest man and worse his very considerable scholarship lightly.

I know of no better introduction to Biblical controversy than *The Bible and its Background* and *Jesus: Myth or History?* For a lucid survey of the development of European civilization *How to Read History* is Wellsian in its scope. On more precise periods I count his studies of the French Revolution and the Reformation among the books I shall re-read next time I am able to enjoy a free convalescence. He first became interested in the French Revolution as a schoolboy and it changed the whole course of his life. He became a socialist and an atheist.

Marxism and Humanism

It is hard to imagine Robertson living in an episcopal palace, odd to picture him as a civil servant. Yet his father was the Bishop of Exeter, and when he left the university he entered the Admiralty, where he remained until 1931. One of his most formative influences was Belfort Bax, whose *Ethics of Socialism* completed his conversion. Thereafter he moved steadily Left and after Munich, at the age of fifty-two, he joined the Communist Party. He took the view that the real conflict of our day is between pre-scientific institutions and scientific humanism, which, on the political plane, is international socialism. He knew, of course, that many of the humanists with whom he loyally cooperated on limited objectives did not accept this equation. He made no attempt to force the issue. He tried with scrupulous honesty to be content with half a loaf in his dealing with us. But although, in his interpretations of history, he avoided Marxist jargon you would have to be very unsophisticated not to see at what he was driving at.

On one point he disagreed with the prevailing Russian attitude to Christianity. He did not accept the mythicist theory which Lenin embraced. He would not budge on this, or on anything else, once his mind was made up. I sometimes complained that he was too doctrinaire, but he took my chiding with dry good humour. He was staunch and incorruptible. He was seventy-five when I saw him for the last time. He knew he would soon die, but he had kept faith with his ideals and was unperturbed. He bequeathed his body for medical research.

Hector Hawton

ARCHIBALD ROBERTSON—A PERSONAL TRIBUTE

Originally published in *The Monthly Record* 66, no. 12 (1961): 6–7

It was a sad moment when, opening the *Daily Worker* for October 18, we read that Archibald Robertson had passed away. For some minutes, we found it impossible to realise that when we said goodbye to him after the social at South Place on September 24 it was to be for the last time and that a platform to which he had conferred both high distinction and outstanding ability would know him no more. Robertson was possibly among the best regular lecturers that South Place Ethical Society has known. Scholarly material was the background for a lecture delivered in popular language and with a forthright manner. One of his outstanding characteristics was his essentially honest intellectualism. There was no attempt to hedge or to mitigate his conclusions because feelings might be ruffled. He believed that the Church had been an evil influence in the history of Europe and said so, backing up his conclusions with a mass of factual evidence which ended by presenting an unanswerable case. In the same way, he believed that capitalistic social orders were the cause of human suffering and oppression and said so, ruffling to fury those who lacked both his knowledge and insight. Robertson's great ability lay in the strength with which he could present a factual thesis. Indeed, had life decreed otherwise, he possessed the type of mind which could have won him high distinction as a jurist and as a pleader in courts of law.

Archibald Robertson came of a highly distinguished family. His father, who bore the same name, was a theologian of strictly orthodox views who crowned a most successful academic and ecclesiastical career by becoming Bishop of Exeter. The son was a Wykehamist who succeeded his father by earning scholastic distinction at the same source, Trinity College, Oxford. Before leaving school, the reading of history had convinced him of the rightness of an atheistic outlook which he never abandoned. Concern

with social matters led him into socialism and into membership of the old Social Democratic Federation. He was an intense admirer of one of the most distinguished historical writers to serve in the socialist ranks, Ernest Belfort Bax, and there is not a little community of approach between Bax's writings and the historical studies which Robertson himself was later to produce. A highly distinguished career at the Admiralty did not permit much polemical activity and it was only after his father's death in 1931 and his subsequent retirement from the Civil Service that Robertson became an outstanding and active figure in the worlds of socialism and freethought even though, for some years, he had already written penetrating studies under the pen-name of "Robert Arch."

Freedom to order his life as he would enabled Robertson to devote his last thirty years to the work dearest to his interests. An important series of books on matters of religious controversy came from his pen. His *Jesus—Myth or History?* was not only a definite contribution to a discussion which has long agitated free thinkers but showed the width of his reading. An important work, *The Origins of Christianity* related his subject to the economic and social background out of which Christianity arose. Robertson had no patience with any philosophy which demanded some transcendent theory of morality, and his *Morals in World History* was a challenge to any viewpoint regarding ethical valuations as other than relative to a particular society. As a historian, Robertson published outstanding monographs upon both the French Revolution and the Reformation. Gradually, he had passed over to a fully Marxist position and the Munich debacle of 1938 led him to join the Communist Party for whose publications he came to write regularly. From a historical angle, he probably became one of the best Marxist theoreticians in the country and he applied his understanding to each new issue as it arose. Few who heard it will forget his masterly analysis at Conway Hall of the Berlin crisis and the sincerity with which he urged the case against going to war over Berlin. Robertson had visited the Soviet Union upon several occasions and had come to respect the stronger

features of Soviet civilisation. He felt strongly that he had twice been fooled in his life by the politicians, in 1914 and again in 1945. It became with him a moral duty to see that another generation was not so fooled as had been his own.

At South Place, Archibald Robertson will long be remembered and respected for his lectures on the platform and for his writings, notably his monthly notes as Custos in the *Monthly Record*. Indeed, the present Custos always feels that it was a declension when circumstances into which it is not necessary to enter made him relinquish this column and created his far less adequate successor. Robertson was probably one of the ablest writers that the *Monthly Record* has ever possessed and the scaling down of his efforts in this direction was not only a loss to the intellectual life of the society but a very real loss to clarified and honest thought in general.

Robertson's position had not really altered over the years. As a rationalist, he related a nineteenth-century background to twentieth-century conditions. Anti-religious and anti-clerical, he represented a tradition which had been understood in their generations by W. J. Fox, Moncure Conway, Charles Bradlaugh, G. W. Foote and Chapman Cohen although it has never been in favour with the “reverent agnostics” or “liberal religionists” who, through the years, have attempted to equate religious heterodoxy with social respectability. Radical through and through, Robertson stressed the oneness of knowledge and experience. He sought to apply the same scientific method which he used in anti-theology to social or political considerations, an undertaking in which he was aided by his very real understanding of economic science. In many ways, he represented the best side of an older secularism whilst relating its essential positions to present-day issues. Of course, such a man had his critics and his opponents but it can only be said that not only was he well able to hold his own when attacked but that the content and method of the opposition merely illustrated the poverty of thought and lack of intellectual courage which lay behind it.

A great leader in the freethinking and humanist movements has passed away after a life which never stinted itself in any cause which he believed to be right and just. South Place can best honour his memory and such of his work as it was privileged to enjoy by carrying on the causes which he sought to forward at the point where the passing of life compelled him to lay down his arms. It is perhaps characteristic that his last public words were spoken at South Place, that his last article printed in the *Daily Worker* a few days after his death dealt with his old foe, the Church of England, and that his will directs his body to be given for purposes of medical research. Such was Archibald Robertson, forthright and thorough to the last.

Custos

ARCHIBALD ROBERTSON

Originally published in *The Word* 23, no. 1 (November 1961): 9

Readers will learn with deep regret of the death of our comrade and contributor, Archibald Robertson, the distinguished writer on religion and philosophy. He died at Oxford on Saturday, October 14. Comrade Robertson was 75. He had been suffering from his heart, and had eased down his London activity because doctors warned him not to travel.

Son of a bishop of Exeter, he had a distinguished career at Oxford and passed into the higher ranks of Civil Service (Admiralty) where he remained until he retired. He joined the Communist Party in 1938 after a visit to the Soviet Union, when he became acquainted on the boat with the late Harry Pollitt. He was a Socialist, a former member of the Social Democratic Federation and an active propagandist. As readers know he was well acquainted with many of the old Social Democratic and Freethought pioneers mentioned in my *No Traitor's Gait*.

Robertson was well known as a lecturer and writer on religion and philosophy, and was often heard at the South Place Ethical Society. He was the director of the Rationalist Press Association and a frequent contributor to its journal *The Humanist*. He wrote several books for the association, including *The Bible and Its Background* in two volumes and *The Reformation*. His most important book, *The Origins of Christianity*, published by Lawrence and Wishart, was translated into Russian and is extremely popular in the Soviet Union. His work was both profound and simply written, and his articles in the *Daily Worker* were always popular. He succeeded brilliantly in applying Marxism to the history and criticism of religion.

During the last three years of his life he sent me copies of his various writings and noted certain essays that he wished me to reprint in *The Word*. This I will do. He thought that I stood widely apart from the rest of the movement and held that now that Stalin's errors and

repression had been recognised, in view of my deep sympathy with Khrushchov in his stand for world peace and bold and fearless propaganda, I ought to be more active on a common platform with members of the Communist Party. A very heavy private correspondence on this subject passed between us and his desire was that it should be published.

Robertson joined the S.D.F. about the time that I left that organisation. He wrote regularly for *Justice* under the *nom de plume* of "Robert Arch."

Guy A. Aldred.

ARCHIBALD ROBERTSON

Originally published in *The Labour Monthly* 43 (November 1961): 514

We deeply regret the death on October 14, of our valued friend and contributor, Archibald Robertson, M.A. Marxist Historian, lecturer and writer on religion and philosophy, he was a distinguished authority on the Reformation; and wrote a number of books on these subjects. He was indeed *Labour Monthly''* star book-reviewer; for he wrote always in simple and direct terms, which are the hallmark of mastery of the subject, insight and clarity of thought. His first review for *Labour Monthly* appeared in July, 1948; and his last will be found on page 543 of this issue.—Ed., *L.M.*[153]

[153] Editors: This is probably R. Palme Dutt.